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1. Fiction, American

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Mr., Miss, & Mrs.

Mr., Miss, & Mrs.

By

Charles Bloomingdale, Jr.

("*Karl*")

Philadelphia & London
J. B. Lippincott Company
1899

MRS

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To all my fellow-workers
In the Fourth Estate,
These little tales of men and things
I dedicate.

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AN UNFINISHED TALE

THERE were about half a score of men in the smoking-room, and through the open door came the strains of a Strauss waltz. Down-stairs in the reception-room the newly-made bride and groom were dancing, and as other couples speedily followed, the men who were selfishly inclined toiled up three flights of stairs to find solace in cigars.

"Well, I never thought they'd make a match of it," said old Fulton, the stock broker, to young Austin, who was in his junior year at college.

"Love's a mighty funny thing," answered young Austin in a worldly-wise way, as he flecked his cigar ashes on the floor.

"Not half so funny as tragic, my boy," came from Bates, a man who had lived.

"Here's Otis," called out some one near the door. "He'll tell you all you want to know of love. He makes money by writing about it."

Otis, who had just come in, laughed. "There are fifty million phases that love can take, boys," he said, as he threw himself into a chair with that easy *nonchalant* grace that betokened a man who was at home in any place.

"Well, Otis, I said that love was a mighty funny thing," spoke Austin, "and Bates said it was oftener tragic than funny."

"I guess Bates is right," answered Otis. "Now before I started for this wedding I began writing a short story. Just as I arrived at the troublesome stage of it, I glanced at the clock and had to hurry into my claw-hammer. Now I had my lovers in an awful tangle, and I can't tell, any more than they can, how it's all going to end."

"Tell us the story," said Bates, "and maybe the crowd here can solve it."

Otis looked around him. He knew most of the men. Yet——

"Well, the tale's an unfinished one. I'll tell it as far as I have it. I'll cut it short; but the door's open if anybody gets tired."

He picked a cigar from the table and, with provoking slowness, cut off an end.

Then he lit and puffed it a bit before speaking. He was thinking how to begin.

"The man was married, the girl engaged, and the mischief was done at a private dance. The music played was the most beautiful and saddest waltz that man ever wrote, when the man looked across the room. His eyes met those of a woman opposite. She turned fiery red; he blushed like a school-boy. It was a case of love at first sight.

"Of course he was presented to her, but what they said doesn't matter much. They said very little, if the truth be told. They were afraid to. When he heard her name he knew she was engaged; when she heard his, she knew he was married.

"Well, she thought she loved the man to whom she was engaged; he thought he loved the woman he married. But Love plays mad pranks at times. Without leave or license he knocks at the door of one's heart. 'Don't come in,' says the voice within. 'Why not?' asks Love. 'Because this heart's occupied,' answers the voice within. 'By whom?' queries Love.

'By Duty,' comes the response. 'Nonsense,' retorts Love, and he opens the door of the heart, throws out the occupant, and sits himself down in the place heretofore occupied by another. And this is the whole story of temptation and one's battle against it.

"She loved him and he loved her,—that sufficed for conscience. They had a trysting-place in the Park to which each would separately go and separately leave. Thus their world knew naught against either of them. If loving is a crime they were guilty,—but their guilt went no further than that.

"She told him," he went on, "that when on that memorable night they first met and she heard that sad, sweet waltz played, she was looking at the floor and thinking how deeply she could love a man if that same music was forever sounding in her ears. Then she looked up just as he looked up, and she felt that a crisis had come in her life. And so they always called that waltz their very own.

"When they met in society, as they often did, they avoided each other. Each acted a part so as to hoodwink the wise

old world; and the man whose name she had promised to share, and the woman who bore his name, were just as wise in their ignorance as was this wise old world.

"And so their love for one another grew. He was married to one woman and loved another, yet if it were not lawfully right to love another woman, again, was it ethically right for him to drag out his life with a woman whom he no longer loved? Would it not be misery for the wife and for him,—life-long misery? And then the girl,—she had given her word to wed a man whom she no longer loved. Better for him and for her to own the mistake. True, the engaged girl and the married man would never have known other happiness than that which had been allotted them had they not met. But they *had* met—else there would have been no tale to tell.

"One autumn day, three months after they had known each other, they sat on a bench in the Park, determined to solve their riddle.

"'I love you,' she said, passionately, 'and you love me. Why should the

laws of men prevent us from marrying? Did God give a woman a heart merely to shrivel it?'

"'I know that I should say that His ways are inscrutable, but I can't say it,' responded the man, gravely. "My wife loves me and trusts me—just as *he* loves and trusts you. But our hearts, our lives, must be considered. We are not puppets, and if God gave us brains and hearts, He gave them to us to use. We can't go on in this way much longer.'

"'I wish I saw the way clear, darling. I will sacrifice anything for you. And yet—yet——'

"'Yet what?' he asked.

"She said nothing, but looked out toward the river. He, too, looked,—but way, way beyond the river his gaze went. And together they sat, speaking no word, but looking and straining eyes and hearts toward that which God would not allow them to see."

Otis ceased talking. There was a dead silence in the room. Then,—

"Is that all?" asked Austin.

"That's as far as I have written," said Otis, yawning. "Bates said he'd finish it."

From down-stairs came the heavenly melody of the waltz from "Faust," with all its sadness and sweetness, its pathos and passion. "Close the door, Austin, old man," said Otis quickly. "I hate that damned music," and he drummed nervously on the arm of his chair.

Austin closed the door. "Say, my dear Otis," he said, "I think the ending of that story would depend on the man's temperament. Fulton, for instance, would go home to his wife, tell her the facts in the case, and ask her for a divorce."

Fulton smiled. "Any one could tell you were still at college, my boy."

"Now if it were Otis," it was Bates who was talking, "why, he would play a waiting game. He would say to the girl, 'Wait and trust in me,'—and she'd wait."

Otis didn't laugh. He smiled a sickly, aged sort of a smile and got up slowly. "Well, I'm going home."

"To finish the story?" queried Bates.

Otis turned quickly, most likely to say something ugly, for his eyes were blazing. He thought better of it, evidently, for he only answered "yes." Then, "Good-night, fellows, and next

time you discuss love remember this: A woman loves a man not for what he is, but what she thinks him." Then he went out.

"Guess it's late enough for us who have wives to be thinking of taking them home," said old Fulton, rising. "Those that have sisters and sweethearts had better come too."

The men rose and filed out to get their overcoats. Bates linked his arm with Austin's.

"Shrewd fellow, that Otis," said Bates, "telling his own story so he could hear what we had to say about it."

"His story!" and little Austin's eyes grew as big as saucers. "Why, Otis is not married."

"Certainly he isn't, but he's engaged, isn't he? Well, he was shrewd enough to reverse positions in the story he told us, and so instead of his case—an engaged man being in love with a married woman—Otis twisted it the other way."

"Who's the woman?"

"That doesn't matter, but Otis and she fell in love very nearly a year ago,—just a month after he was engaged to the other girl."

"Well, Otis is a shrewd fellow, and as you said, he'll win her by playing a waiting game."

"No, he won't," answered Bates. "He may win her,—he seldom fails in what he undertakes,—but it won't be a waiting game."

Bates and Austin were coming downstairs at this juncture and two girls with nubias on head were standing at the foot of the flight. "Hurry up," called up one. "Do you men expect a girl to wait a lifetime for you?"

"Hear that?" whispered Bates.

"Yes," answered Austin. "Why?"

"It is specially apropos of Otis,—that's all. He must hurry up,—mustn't expect a girl to wait a lifetime for him."

"But what will he do?" queried Austin.

"Oh, hang it, man, this isn't a quiz class at college,—we're at a wedding. Otis began the story and said it was unfinished. Let him finish it."

THE FIRST

HE lay on the bed calmly awaiting the end. There was no suffering now; he was merely fading away as all consumptives do. And he'd either strangle to death or just fall asleep quietly and die. And it might be two weeks or it might be two hours. To him it mattered little either way.

"What time is it?" he asked weakly of the woman who sat by the bed.

"Ten minutes of two," she answered. "Try and get a little sleep,—it will soon be daylight."

The summer breeze stole softly into the sick room, quietly, gently, as if it knew the angel of death were near. And it fluttered the counterpane and noiselessly skimmed across the floor and then tiptoed out of the window.

"Where's Agnes?" asked the sick man.

The woman by the bed gave a little gasp and clutched at her heart. "She comes on at two o'clock," she answered, gently. "You think of her more than you do of me,—don't you?" she asked,

wistfully. "But I'll be back again at four o'clock, dear. And I'll read to you then,—the sun will be up by four o'clock. But you must sleep while she watches, because sleep will make you stronger. Then you'll enjoy my reading to you."

The man shook his head mournfully. "You two women have been too good to me," he said, half to himself,—"better than I deserved,—far better than I deserved." And he sighed,—one of those pitiful, gasping little sighs that have to force themselves into the throat when the heart is heavy.

Slowly the minutes passed. From the church steeple across the way two o'clock boomed out. Hardly had the bell's deep-toned voice died away before the door of the sick chamber was softly opened and a woman entered the room.

"It's two o'clock, Clare," said the new-comer, in a whisper, to the woman by the bed. "It's my turn now. I brewed you a cup of tea and put it by the table. I'll waken you at four."

The other woman rose and walked quietly over to the door. She stopped, her hand on the knob, and looked over

at the sick man, hoping for some sign. But his eyes were closed. With a sigh, she let herself out, and noiselessly closed the door behind her.

Very quietly the new-comer sat in the chair by the bed. She, too, looked over at the sleeping man, looked with eyes red and swollen from weeping. The end was near,—and she knew it.

The end was near,—ah, yes! But how far off the beginning was! He and she there, and the morning of life. For there were love and youth in those days and it brought them closer to God. And now for one of them it brought the evening of life. For one, each tiny tick of the watch brought him once more closer to God,—to God and to Eternity!

She was the first. In the glorious strength of his early youth he had wooed her,—with all the passion of first love he had won her. And she had yielded heart and soul to him,—for she was the first.

And the years had passed while she nursed her poor broken heart,—and he had gone his way and she had gone hers. And she had suffered as only

women suffer. And he had forgotten as is the right of man.

But a little time back and she had heard that he was stricken mortally; that his days were numbered. And she had come to him dragging her pride in the dust behind her. And the other woman and herself had met in that sick room—and each understood. And one had watched while one had slept, and between them they eased the pillow of the sick man and fought Death each inch of the way. It was a three-cornered fight at first, each woman struggling for herself to keep that little bit of life in the poor wasted frame, and Death relentlessly sitting by waiting his chance. But of late it was the women on one side and Death on the other—and Death was winning.

The woman in the chair looked over at the man. His eyes were wide open,—he was looking at her earnestly. She put out her hand all a-tremble and gently clasped his wasted fingers. "What is it, dear?" she whispered, brokenly.

He only shook his head sadly from side to side.

"What is it, Will?" she asked again.

"I was only thinking, Agnes darling, —only thinking," and again he moved his head from side to side slowly. His voice was very weak she noted. There was a tone of weariness in it.

He closed his eyes and she thought he had dropped to sleep. But presently he spoke, his eyes still closed. "You know of what I was thinking, don't you, Agnes?"

"Yes," she answered, her heart close on to breaking. And she pressed his fingers ever so gently.

Again there was a long silence. Then, as if in his sleep, he rambled on: "You know of what I am thinking, Agnes. Dear God, have mercy on me."

"Amen," said the woman beside him.

Very gently she withdrew her hand from his and stilled her breath that no noise might disturb him. And after a space she heard three o'clock strike from across the way.

The sound made the consumptive move uneasily in his sleep. "Agnes was my first," he mumbled. Then disjointedly and with long pauses between each word, and in the unconsciousness

of sleep, he drowsily muttered, "She —was—my—first." And his voice sank away into nothingness.

Little by little the gray of the summer morning began to steal into the room, making the dim little jet of gas seem uncanny, sickly. A sleepy bird piped forth a drowsy note,—a tassel at the window fluttered in the early morning breeze.

And the woman's thoughts went fleeing back to a summer morning of long ago, when the note of a bird had wakened her. And she remembered how she had dropped to her knees on that morning and poured forth her thanksgiving to God for having given to her the blessed boon of love. And she remembered how she had leaned out of her window in the gray of that early summer morn of long ago and had cried with the very joy of being alive.

She dug her nails into her palms now in the agony of thought. "Oh, God," she whispered, "as this man must die soon, let him die now. Let him die with me near him,—with no one else in the room with him,—with no thought or sight of that other woman. Let him

die before four o'clock, oh, God. Take him to you, oh, Father, and forgive him as I forgive him, as I have forgiven him. Send the Angel of Death to him now while only I am here. I was his first, oh, God, and it is written that the first shall be last. Let me be his last,—my face the last he shall see on earth, my voice the last he shall hear."

Her frame shook with sobs of agony, and she put her hands to her face and rocked to and fro and shut out the sight of the world. And then four o'clock boomed from across the way. And with the last stroke she heard the bed creak.

Slowly she uncovered her face, and saw, or thought she saw, a shadow on the wall,—saw it glide from the wall to the bed and then out of the window.

And then she was conscious of a strange, unnatural, creeping silence. She turned in a scared way toward the bed, her heart thumping with a great dread. He lay there calm and peaceful, seemingly asleep. She lifted his hand; it was heavy as lead,—limp, lifeless.

She did not cry out. For a space she could not move. Then she sat

down in the chair again and looked, not at the dead man, but straight in front of her.

How long she sat there she did not know. On a sudden she was conscious of a swish of skirts, and Clare stood beside her. "It's twenty minutes of five, Agnes," she whispered. "Why didn't you call me?"

The other woman roused herself and got to her feet. "Why call you?" she asked, and her voice was even and icily monotonous. "Why call you? He's here—dead."

Clare looked from Agnes to the bed with eyes that seemed starting from their sockets. "Dead!" she whispered in an awestruck tone; "dead! and you never wakened me,—let me sleep while he was dying?" She passed her hands over her forehead quickly and gasped once or twice as if for air. Then she gave one piercing shriek and pitched headlong on the bed.

The other woman felt a fierce exultation, and she smiled in an odd, foolish way, and noted that the sun was pouring into the room and that the birds were filling the air with melody. "The first

shall be last," she repeated softly to herself,—" the first shall be last."

And though the room spun round and she felt a great weakness come upon her and the sound of rushing waters was in her ears, yet she gained the door, and opening it, closed it quietly behind her. And not once did she turn to look at the dead man on the bed or the living woman beside him.

SECRETS

"SIT down here, please," said the man; "I've something to say to you."

"Is it very important?" smiled back the girl. "I was just going down into the cabin to fetch Mrs. Moss on deck. Is it very important?" she repeated.

"It's very important indeed," answered the man. "Sit down."

He pushed a stool for her as she groped along the rail for it, for the night was dark. "It's a pity," she said, with a little sigh, "that our outing comes to an end to-night. Mr. Reynolds says we'll run into Newport to-morrow, and as Mrs. Moss is my chaperon, I've got to go to Narragansett with her the day after. It's been a jolly ten-day cruise, hasn't it?" and she sighed again as she looked out over the waters.

The man said nothing, contenting himself with looking intently at her face. The lamp from the hatchway threw a faint light upon her. He sat in the shadow.

"Well," she said after a long silence, "what have you got to tell me?"

"You must do the telling," he replied. "I'm going to ask you something."

Another long silence. Then, "Well?" queried the girl.

"I might as well come right out with it," he said, with a forced laugh, "as this is likely to be my last chance of seeing you alone for six months, at least. Well, here's the question,—when do you marry?"

She turned and looked out at the waters, and spoke to them rather than to the man at her side. "I don't know," she answered, slowly. "No," she repeated, shaking her head. "I don't know."

"You've been engaged almost from childhood, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," she answered; "it was an understood affair between the families before I'd cut my first teeth."

"Not your wisdom teeth?" he queried, pointedly.

She did not answer at once. Then, "No, I haven't cut my wisdom teeth yet, either, or else," and she turned her face toward him, and he noted a pained, troubled look upon it,—"or else," she

repeated, "I wouldn't be talking to you in this strain, or listening to you, either."

"Shall I stop talking?" he asked, quietly.

He waited a full minute for her answer, but none came. He listened for a time to the soft lap of the baby waves against the yacht, and the blood in his head pulsed with the quick throb of the engine, and kept time with it.

"I only know him superficially," he said,—"just as one man in society knows another. He's clever. And then," went on the man, "he's well-bred,—a gentleman in every respect. His manners are perfect."

"Yes," answered the girl, "he's a gentleman." She turned from the sea abruptly and faced her companion. "He's miles away from here to-night," she said, hotly,—"let him stay there. Don't talk of him. It's hard enough to do one's duty without you—you——" She bit her lip and turned away.

"Your duty?" he repeated, scornfully. "Just because his father and your father were business partners is it duty to make love a business arrangement? It savors more of France than of America,—or

more of Turkey or China. Look here, May," he added, grimly, "I'm going to give you a chance to refuse me for the second time,—will you be my wife?"

The girl would not trust herself to speak. But he noted the look of agony on her face as she shook her head "no."

He dropped on his knee beside her and took one of her hands in his. It lay there passive, unanswering to his fervid pressure.

"May I speak, dear, just a little? I won't talk long,—just a little. May I, dear?" he whispered.

She found her voice now. "It's no use to speak," the answer came trembling back.

"But it is use, dear," he whispered. "You haven't seen him for four months now, and you say he's only written once in that time. That isn't lover-like, dear. Maybe he doesn't care so much as you think he does."

"I know he doesn't care," the girl answered in a hard, metallic tone.

"Then why torture me—and yourself?" His voice was tense, vibrant, and it thrilled the girl and swayed her, moved her apart from herself and shat-

tered pride and reserve, and all but took her strength. And she loosened her hand from his and bent down to him until her eyes looked into his and her breath was hot on his cheek. "I've been his wife for four months," she whispered,—whispered so low he could scarce hear at first.

For a space he knelt at her feet dazed. Then he rose slowly like a man who is old. And she, too, rose; and the girl and the man stood face to face.

From the cabin came wafted up to them a burst of laughter, from the distance the far-away muffled sound of a bell as it rose and fell on the waves.

There was a step on the companion-way and Mrs. Moss called up, "May, dear?"

"Yes, auntie," answered the girl; "what is it?"

Mrs. Moss's head appeared. "It's time you were retiring, dear. I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Franklin, that I'm forced to steal my charge away from you. Better me, though, than a man, I suppose," and she laughed.

"I bow to superior force, Mrs. Moss," he answered lightly.

"Keep those pretty speeches for Newport," laughed back the chaperon. "Has he been saying pretty things to you, too, May?"

"No, indeed," answered the girl, smiling. "We've been having a very serious talk indeed, auntie."

"Stocks and bonds and such stuff, I'll wager," and Mrs. Moss shook her fan playfully at Franklin. "You American men are so full of business you never have time to make love to a girl," and Mrs. Moss frowned laughingly.

"We never get the chance," answered Franklin, grimly.

"Now you're taking me to task for interrupting you. Come on, May, we won't let him talk to us again to-night, will we?"

"No, we won't, auntie," said the girl. "Good-night, Mr. Franklin," and she held out her hand.

"Good-night, Miss Forbes," and their hands met. And he noted that hers was as cold as marble, and she marvelled that his was hot and moist.

"Good-night, Mrs. Moss," he said.

"Good-night, Mr. Franklin," called

back the chaperon. "Don't tell the sea all your secrets."

"I haven't any left," he retorted meaningly.

He waited until they had reached the bottom of the ladder. Then he walked over to his camp-stool and noted something white on the deck. He picked it up. It was her handkerchief. And the perfume of her own sweet presence pervaded it, and he was for putting it in his pocket to keep as a memory.

And then he bethought him. And he walked to the vessel's side and softly dropped the kerchief in the sea. And he watched it, a bit of white, go drifting away, tossed hither and thither by each passing wave, friendless, alone.

And he wondered, as he watched, how long it would be before it sank beneath the waves or before the salt of the sea had washed away its fragrance.

THE KING'S DAUGHTERS' MUSICALE

THE musicale was a big success to begin with. To end with,—well, one could not say anything about that, for the musicale had just begun. As far as it had gone, however, it was a success. Miss Jenison had sung one of Chaminade's songs, and Mr. Sandley had played Paderewski's "Minuet." And when you remember that the admission was only one dollar, why, the prospective programme was certainly worth that sum.

But those were only two numbers. Miss Martin was going to recite a bit from "La Tosca," a bit in which Sara Bernhardt was superb. Miss Black was going to play one of Ole Bull's pieces on her violin, and a very ethereal-looking young man who had written verse for the daily papers would recite one of his own poems. Five or six other people would do something or other toward making the evening pass pleas-

antly, and the dollars that one paid for admission made one master of Mrs. Fair's house and grounds, for that evening, at least.

Of course, all the King's Daughters were there, and so were the cavaliers. The buzz of the conversation when any one was singing, or was playing the piano, carried its own drowsy hum through the spacious parlor to the veranda, and from thence to the garden, where refreshments were served. Pretty Chinese lanterns strung on poles made the June night look the more beautiful, while a group of poor children flattened their noses against the iron railings and envied the men and women who strolled about the grounds.

Outside the rays of light from the Chinese lanterns, two young men—young Durry, the banker's son, and Tom Manning, whose father's trade was "lard"—were sitting on the grass discussing the musicale.

"Who disburses the money the King's Daughters make?" asked Durry, as he lit a fresh cigarette.

"A committee of girls," vouchsafed Manning.

"Do any good?"

"Lots."

Some one was butchering Mascagni on the piano, and the two men on the grass stopped talking out of sheer pity to listen. Then when a dainty clapping of hands had told of the termination of the performer's prowess, Durry went on talking.

"Why don't some men help them? It's easy to fool a girl, you know, and a good many folks get charity that don't deserve it."

"Many do," assented Manning. "The girls often have odd cases to deal with, too. Sister had a family to look after last Christmas. At Christmas every one of the King's Daughters takes about three or four dollars and buys some poor family a Christmas dinner. Incidentally they give such of their wardrobe as has outgrown its usefulness or its style. Sister's particular family last Christmas was an old lady and three young ones. The lady in question eked out a precarious existence by removing superfluous real estate from linens and other fabrics, and returned them to their owners in various states of purity."

"Pity that class of women can't cleanse characters," put in Durry, wisely.

"Some won't wash," answered Manning, pointedly.

Durry was silent. Then he said, pettishly, "Go on with your beautiful tale."

"Well, the old woman was taken down with the grip and the children and herself began to starve. Enter sister upon the scene, takes in the situation and promises the Christmas dinner. She went around to the old lady's room the day before Christmas, carrying some of little Bob's underwear that he'd outgrown, a little dress, and one of mother's last year's hats. In a basket she had a plump turkey, some cranberries, celery, and other truck. The old lady grabbed the hat first and didn't deign to look at the edibles.

"'I couldn't carry all the things,' said sister, panting, 'so I'm going out for the potatoes now.'

"The old lady was just able to hobble a bit, but she adjusted the hat and peacocked about the room before she answered. Then she said, 'I suppose you'd pay fifteen cents for the potatoes, wouldn't yer?'

"Sister said she would spend eighteen.

"'Well,' answered the old lady, wistfully, 'suppose you leave out the potatoes and give me the money so that I can buy a looking-glass to see this hat.'"

"What did your sister do?" inquired Durry.

"What any other woman would have done under the circumstances,—bought the looking-glass."

"Did she boil or stew it for the Christmas dinner?" sneered Durry.

"Neither," responded Manning, calmly. "She possibly looked in that glass and thanked God that there were more women than men in the world."

Again there was a silence between the two men. Then Durry, for want of something relevant, remarked again that girls were easily fooled,—especially in charitable work.

"Girls are not so easily fooled," responded Manning. He was engaged to be married.

"I differ with you, Tom."

"Oh, you pride yourself on your discernment because you happen to be rated a good flirt. But a woman's heart

may be trifled with and yet—well, there's lots of yets," and Manning roused himself to a sitting posture. "There's Miss Reynolds singing. You know her voice, I'll be bound. You thought flirting with her a dainty waste of time until you fell in love with her. Then she spoke her mind to you, and you—well, you're still unmarried."

"I thought you were talking of charity," put in Durry, quietly.

"So we were when we started. You were the one who branched off."

"Maybe I did love her," said Durry, musingly. "I came here and paid my dollar just to hear her sing. And so her voice gives one dollar more to the poor at least. Who gets benefited this time, Tom?"

"A woman. She had a husband they say. Some say—well, at any rate, she has a boy about six years old and she's ill with consumption. She began dying about six months ago, and the King's Daughters at once held a meeting to devise some way to raise money so that the poor soul's journey toward the grave could be the easier.

"Has it taken them six months to

find some way to help her? Wonder the woman didn't die and the King's Daughters use the red tape to lower the coffin."

"She's pretty near dead now," answered Manning, blowing a whiff of smoke skyward.

The plaintive wail from a violin came wafted from the parlor, and the elusive sadness of Gillet's "Echoes of the Ball" stole out into the hush of the June night. A noisy cricket at the foot of the tree near which the men were sitting stilled its cheery note. Then Durrv broke the silence.

"That music sounds like the cry of a woman when the world has turned its back on her. It has the ring of human sorrow for all its trifling sweetness."

"You're unusually sober to-night, Ralph. Thinking of Miss Reynolds?"

"No; of the dying woman. Come, let's go into the house."

The two men arose and started for the veranda. Manning threw his cigarette into the next yard as he said, "Sister says she doesn't think the poor soul will last another week. Got a pretty name, too,—Ethel Vincent."

Durry stopped as if shot—and then pitched forward on his face.

In a second Manning was beside his friend and had put him on his feet. "What is it, old man?" he asked, anxiously.

Durry's face was very white. "Slipped," he said, curtly. The blood was trickling from a tiny gash in his forehead and he slowly wiped his face with his handkerchief. "Let's sit down again," he said.

They walked back to where they had been seated. For a long time no word was spoken. Then Durry said,—

"Who saw the woman last?"

"Sister and Miss Reynolds. You know the King's Daughters go in pairs to these places, and so Kate and your divinity were deputized to look after the Vincent woman. They saw her again yesterday. Kate says the woman won't last the week out."

"What right has Miss Reynolds to go to see a woman about whose respectability she has any doubt?"

"The same right as has my sister. They are women."

"But, Tom——"

"Look here, Durry. No matter what light you cast on this subject, bear in mind the woman is dying. Your judgment does not enter into this case. She'll be before a higher tribunal in a little while."

The piano was gurgling a Strauss waltz and both men stopped talking to listen. A tiny whiff of wind swayed the Chinese lanterns and the scream of a locomotive came faintly from the distance. Durry shifted his position, lit another cigarette, and then asked,—

"Do you ever feel blue, Tom? The sort of blueness that comes from hearing of sadness? It comes from a mental introspection brought on by an association of ideas. For instance, this woman you were talking of—er—er—what's her name?"

"Ethel Vincent."

"This Vincent woman has made me feel rather downcast. Tell me more about her and by virtue of homœopathy I may be cured." He was gripping his nails into his hands and his face was working nervously.

"Well, sister says that yesterday when she and Miss Reynolds called they found the Vincent woman pretty badly

off. Some of the neighbors had given the boy food, but they seemed not to understand that the consumptive wanted a different form of nourishment. And so sister went out to buy the woman something and Miss Reynolds stayed. When Kate got back she says she was never so surprised in her life, for Miss Reynolds was kneeling by the Vincent woman's bed holding the woman's hand, while both were crying."

"What do you think passed between them?" Durry's voice was thick with suppressed excitement.

"Sister says she thinks the Vincent woman told the story of her life to Miss Reynolds. But Miss Reynolds refused to tell sister anything save that Ethel Vincent once moved amid much better surroundings. I don't see much in the whole thing that could be termed at all dramatic. Yet the King's Daughters are going around shaking their wise little heads and saying the woman has a history."

"Every woman has," commented Durry seriously.

"Possibly. Yet there is no excuse for the world to try and nose it out."

"No; it's no one's business but hers.

What right had the Vincent woman to say anything to Miss Reynolds?"

"Maybe her conscience troubled her," answered Manning, rising. "Consciences are mighty inconvenient."

"Yes, unless they're kept under lock and key," was Durry's grim rejoinder as he scrambled to his feet.

At the parlor door the two separated. Manning joined one of the King's Daughters and Durry walked over to a cut-glass jar in which notes and silver peacefully weighed each other down. He took a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and dropped it gently in the jar.

"Growing generous?" queried a voice at his elbow.

He turned quickly and beheld Miss Reynolds, a nubia thrown over her head.

"Better late than never," he laughed uneasily.

"I differ with you," she said, coldly.

Then the two stood there looking into each other's eyes, the man trying to read the thoughts of the woman he loved, the woman looking down into the man's soul.

"Ethel died to-night at six o'clock," said Miss Reynolds softly. "The money

you put in that jar will help bury her. Are you not glad—glad you were so charitable?" There was a sneer in her voice—a contempt. Yet her face was smiling.

The man's face flushed, but his eyes were riveted on hers.

"She will be buried on Tuesday," went on the woman he loved.

"Miss Reynolds's carriage," called a voice from the door.

Miss Reynolds inclined her head for a second and then turned again toward Durry. "You will be at the funeral?"

He could not take his eyes from her face, but he managed to nod in the affirmative.

"I would if I were you," she said, simply, and then turned and left him.

Durry stood irresolute. The room was swimming around him and two faces were dancing in front of his eyeballs. Which woman had his heart? He tried to think which he loved the better, and all the time the pier-glass was bowing and scraping and the piano was dancing and the chairs had formed for a polacca.

Then Manning tapped him on the

shoulder. "Your forehead's bleeding, old man, and you look sickly. Come into the air. Everybody's gone but us."

The musicale netted the King's Daughters one hundred and seven dollars and forty-three cents, and Ethel Vincent's funeral wasn't skimped in any particular.

THE MAN WHO REFORMED

RAMSEY'S reformation was the talk of the town,—that is, that portion (or portions) of the town which knew him best. He had forsworn the Rathskellar and the roof-garden,—kept away from principal streets at certain hours of the day and night,—but principally at night, for it was then that his "crowd" began to live. He even denied himself the theatres for fear of meeting his old associates,—he'd sold his wheel,—and he stayed home o' nights. He'd reformed, he said,—and he acknowledged he was weak. When you can avoid temptation what's the use, said he, of running into it? After a while, he argued, he'd go around to the old haunts and see the boys. But now—now in the chrysalis state—he wasn't going to be too sure of his strength,—he wasn't going to take risks.

And so he kept away—and the crowd wondered. They wondered why he reformed, what was the reason back of it

all,—who was the girl? And then, too, as Drummond very sagely put it,—and Drummond voiced the opinion of them all,—"if Ramsey wanted to reform what was the use of being an old woman over it? Why couldn't he meet the crowd and drink ginger ale or seltzer,—be sociable over his reformation instead of making such a severe, grumpy affair of it?"

But Ramsey kept to himself. Night after night he would go to his rooms direct from his office,—night after night he would sit at his window and look at the stars,—sit until the night grew gray and the morning breeze fanned his pale, wan face. For Ramsey was very much in earnest—and he was very weak. That was why he made himself part of the night,—an atom at a window-sill. For the night was strong—and so was solitude!

And yet for all his vigils and for all his weakness, he had not shed one tear. And this was remarkable, too, for Ramsey was keenly sensitive, finely attuned, sympathetic to a degree. There was much to think of,—much to regret,—much to cry about, too, had Ramsey

only dared. But he fought himself inch by inch, grew thinner, grew whiter. And yet he would win because he said he would win. And when once Ramsey said he would do a thing, every man who knew him knew that deed as good as done. And yet he was weak,—pitifully, pathetically weak in this instance. And why?

All because the woman's face would not fade way. Try as he might—and oh, how hard he did try!—that one, beautiful, seductive, luring, loving face danced before his eyeballs. No use to shut his eyes. Let him look at the moon,—her radiance, her glory, paled the moonlight. Let him look at the clouds as they scurried past wildly, scared and ghostly,—she rode them. Let him look at a star,—and behold she was in it.

But Ramsey fought on. He fought for the better life that he would build on the ashes of the old, profitless one,—he fought for forgetfulness of the love that was worthless, but oh, so beautiful for all its worthlessness. For she had loved him once,—and those were the days he thought of,—over and over and over again he lived them at his lonely win-

dow-sill. When he found out—oh, well, what if he did find her out? No one could take from him the deep, deep joy that was his once. The sorrow, the bitterness of the awakening, might be added to his lot; but the sweetness of the dream could not be taken from him. That was all his—and hers! She had fooled him—yes! But then she had loved him once! And that was recompense!

It seemed strange that when the woman had dropped him,—that when she had thrown him aside as one would a squeezed-out lemon,—it seemed strange that Ramsey should then have started on his reformation. Most men would have seized the excuse to go to the dogs, would have gone down-hill steadily, swiftly, and muttered in their cups of the woman who had sent them there. But Ramsey was different.

Instead of going to the dogs, instead of merely jogging along at the pace he was then going,—instead of either of these, Ramsey pulled up short and started his reformation. He had lived, he had loved. Now he would live again,—live differently. But he would never love again,—he could not.

He knew the woman at her true worth now. She was bad, cruelly, dissolutely, sensually, indiscriminately bad. She had ruined men who were infinitely better than him, thought Ramsey, but, then, —and his breath came in little gasps,— but, then, she had never loved until she met him. As she had always swayed men, so, too, had Ramsey swayed her— while she loved him! It was the one true, honest emotion the woman had felt in all her life. But it could not last,— or it would not,—and Ramsey found it out,—found out other things too. And so he had dragged his wounded pride and his hurt heart away into his solitude and had looked out into the night for help and for strength.

But Ramsey won his fight. He would have won it quicker, perhaps, but his weakness came in the remembering that she once had loved him and that the memory of her face was always with him. And it would be with him until he died. He knew that, and was deeply happy in the thought of it; although he also knew that for his own peace of mind it were better could he forget her.

One summer night at the sea-shore

Ramsey felt himself cured. From January until August he had striven, and he had lived down the old life and he was strong. And it was merely to test that strength that, hearing sounds of music issuing from the doorway of a fashionable café, he followed the crowd and pushed his way in.

Lights of many colors, hundreds of them that flashed and sparkled; silks and satins that rustled musically past him; the odor of wine, the merry clink of glasses, the rippling peal of woman's laughter, the quickly-moving music that tripped lightly and merrily,—the buzz and hum like swarming bees,—all these intoxicated him for the moment. It was a sight of the land he had left, an oasis of pleasure; and he sniffed of the air with nostrils distended and drank in the scene before him as one who has long been thirsty.

By degrees the scene as a whole differentiated itself into groups. There was Bagley at one of the tables, and Fanshawe, too, with the little Remsen girl. Farther on was Dougherty—both the Dougherty boys—and Mrs. Johns and her two nieces; and Blake and Hender-

son and Reynolds,—why, it seemed as if the entire crowd he knew had emptied itself into this particular café. He made a move to join them, but drew back hurriedly when he recollected how long a time it had been since he met them, and how they would chaff him. He was shyly sensitive on this point; so he found a little table in an unobserved corner and called for a lemonade.

Then, more at his ease, he once more looked around on the groups,—cosmopolitan they were, the moneyed element in the majority,—but all sorts of men, all sorts of women.

And then—merciful God—he saw *her!* A hot flush swept over his face and his whole body tingled. Then he felt icy cold.

She was sitting at a table not twenty paces from him; with her were a lady and a gentleman,—both elderly. Her face was turned half-way toward him, it was sadder than when he had seen it last,—more beautiful, he thought. She was gowned entirely in black,—not a jewel, not a ribbon, to relieve the sombreness of her attire.

For fully a minute his gaze was riv-

eted on her; he drank in every detail of her beauty, his heart in his eyes. And then a thought took possession of him, and his eyes, so full of a tender love before, began now to blaze with a light that was fierce and malignant.

Why, he asked himself, was that woman there? What had she to do with that refined-looking old lady or that quiet, gentle-looking old man? What plot did she have in that fertile brain of hers?

And then he saw the old lady take the hand of the woman in hers and pat it gently and smile up at her with love in her dear, kindly eyes. And that prompted into action the thought that was in Ramsey's mind. This woman was an adventuress; she had wound herself around this dear old couple. She would ruin them as she had ruined others, and then she would go on her laughing way and hunt more victims.

Ramsey had suffered through her; he, at least, could save others from a similar fate. It was his duty, he felt, it would be the crowning point in his reformation, he thought, if he could warn those whom this woman was about to strike.

He was on his feet immediately, and had quickly made his way to the table where the three people were sitting. He tapped the old gentleman quietly on the shoulder. "May I have a word with you, sir?" he said in a low tone.

The old gentleman rose. Ramsey's face was very white and his under lip trembled, but he gathered himself together with an effort, and spoke hurriedly and in a low, tense tone. "You must pardon me for coming up to you, sir, but I come to save you from a very great danger. The young woman who is at the table here with yourself and, I presume, your wife is an evil woman, a black-hearted, foul, merciless adventuress. I do not want to make a scene for you, sir, but get her out of your sight as quickly as possible. You can't imagine the misery she has caused,—the agony,—the shame. Do you know who she is?"

The old gentleman's face was as white as wax, and two big tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. "I know her, sir," he said; "she is my daughter."

And then, before Ramsey could recover his breath, she, the woman, had

plucked him by the sleeve. "Go away now, Will," she said. "You have done your work, go away now. I, too, am passing through my reformation. I'm doing it my way,—the hard way. I am not shutting myself up where no man may see me. As I lived the old life amid the whirl and excitement, so I am living the new,—the same scenes, the same places. I come here now so men may point me out,—may stretch their fingers toward me and whisper who I was,—the lives I've wrecked. It is my punishment, my cross, and I am bearing it. For every pang they give me, for every finger that stabs my heart through and through, I feel that the good God on high washes out a stain. And when I am cleansed I'm going away somewhere and try to be what I should have been. See! there are two men pointing at me now. Go away or you'll share in my ignominy and shame. If I came here or went anywhere alone, men would speak to me. So my father and mother help me. God bless them for their strength and their love! Go away, now, Will, and please—please—please never speak to me, dear. I'll let you

hear from me some day if—if—if—maybe if—if you—oh, please, please go away now!"

She pushed him gently from her, and the lights danced in front of him, and there was a great sound in his ears like the buzzing of bees. Yet he turned toward her and tried to choke out an answer.

"I will wait until I hear from you, Constance. I will wait until you are ready. I, too, have suffered, and I understand. God look to you and help you—and me!"

And such was their parting. No embrace, no clasp of hands. Nothing, save a look—a soul message.

And then, somehow,—he never knew how,—Ramsey threaded his way past the laughing groups and stood beneath the stars again.

AN UNPRODUCTIVE ROMANCE

IF the man had only spoken—had only explained—the whole affair would have had a different ending. But he refused to say why this was so, and why that was not so,—and a summer romance was spoiled, and a man and a woman hid their hurts and the world jogged on.

It all came about over a philopena debt,—and of having time to kill, and hills to climb, and of reading Tennyson to the tune of splashing mountain cascades. For she was merely a woman and he was merely a man, and the blue haze on the mountains and the tender gleam of the sun in the valley, and the song of birds and the pungent smell of pines and rhododendrons,—all these are to blame.

After they had eaten philopena, she asked Ashton what he wanted; for her part she'd take a pair of silver embroidery scissors. No, she wouldn't want that,—scissors cut friendship, she said.

"Friendship isn't the dearest thing in the world, Miss Ames," said Ashton, quietly, and his eyes shot a challenge.

"No?" she queried. "Well, I've never found anything quite so dear."

"Nor I," he answered; "yet I know it exists."

And then they both were busy with their thoughts.

After a space she said, "Well, what must I give you?"

"Suppose we make it anything I ask for?"

"But it might be something awfully extravagant, and I'm terribly poor just now."

"Well, suppose I say it won't cost you much?"

"All right," she answered, after a moment's hesitation; "I'm agreed."

And ten minutes later he had handed her his book and shouted "philopena."

"Well, what do you want?" she asked.

"A kiss."

Of course, she grew indignant then,—only mildly so, of course,—but it is the first law in social ethics that a woman

should grow indignant when a man asks her for a kiss. It isn't becoming, nor maidenly, for a woman to yield at once, —and Miss Ames knew what was correct and what was not.

And so for fifteen minutes they argued pro and con, she parrying with consummate skill and plying the eternal question of woman, "What in the world would he think of her if she would allow him to kiss her?"

"But if you don't," he persisted, "you break your word."

"But if I do," she answered, "I lose my self-respect."

"Nonsense," he answered, fallaciously; "if you keep your word you can't lose your self-respect."

"Is keeping your word such a very great thing with you?" she asked.

"It is my one virtue," he answered, very seriously. "I have never broken it in my life. Once upon a time, merely because I kept my word, I got into trouble of a very serious kind, and social ostracism followed. But I kept my word, and I'm content." And he brought his lips together closely.

"You socially ostracized!" she said,

incredulously. "Why, what are you saying?"

"Nothing," he answered, curtly. "But," and his mood changed, "are you going to keep your word?"

She hesitated. "You said you'd ask me for something that wouldn't cost much."

"Well?" he queried.

"Well, this would cost me a great deal," she answered, slowly.

"Then you refuse me?" he asked, quietly.

She was plainly distressed. "I'd like to keep my word, you know, seeing you put such a great store by it. I'd like to keep my word, indeed I would; but don't you see how hard you make it for me?"

"I told you before that it is hard at times to keep one's word, but that shouldn't deter you from keeping it."

"Oh, it's easy enough for a man to keep his word."

"Just as easy for a woman," he answered.

"Oh, no," she said, quickly; "women are different."

"How different?"

She flustered about helplessly trying to find an answer. "Oh, they're just different," she said, finally.

"Which means you break your word?"

She kept silent for a long time. Then in a voice so low it was almost a whisper she said, her eyes on the ground, her face scarlet, "I will keep my word."

"Thank you," he said, as he rose to his feet; "that was all I wished you to do. You have kept your word by signifying your intention to do what you promised. I don't want a kiss that is in payment of a debt; when you're ready to give me one of your own sweet will, then I shall be very glad,—it will be a different sort of a kiss then. I wanted you to keep your word—and you've done so. Now, we'd better be getting back to the hotel,—it's dinner hour."

He helped her to her feet, and she stood up close to him and looked squarely into his eyes. "Do you know," she said, unsteadily, "you have made me very, very happy by your generous behavior."

"Pray don't think of it," he answered, easily.

And as they walked to the hotel he was very careful to speak of impersonal topics,—the bracing air—the glint of the sun on the patch of green firs—the shape of a cloud that hung over a nearby mountain.

The next day she went to town,—a telegram from her mother, who was seriously ill.

"I'll be back in a couple of weeks," she said,—"shall I find you here?"

"I'll wait until you come back," he answered. "May I hope for a letter from you?"

"Yes," she answered, "I'll write—and let you know how mamma is."

And so she went away.

And right here the story should end, for then the reader thinks that all things would come aright, and like the nice folks in the fairy-tales, "they married and lived happy thereafter." But fairy-tales are relegated to back closets when we grow up, and so this story must go on in a grown-up way.

Two days after Miss Ames returned to town Ashton received a letter. Its brevity was its consoling feature.

MR. ASHTON:

Since returning home I have learned of something that makes it imperative our friendship should cease. I am deeply obliged for the courtesy you have shown me. Please try to forget that we have ever met.

ALICE AMES.

(Thursday.)

Ashton sat down with a very white face and penned the following:

MISS AMES:

There are two sides to every story. Mine has never been told, nor will it ever be.

I thank you for your very great promptness in writing.

JAMES ASHTON.

Three more days elapsed and then another letter came from Miss Ames. It was longer than the first.

MY DEAR MR. ASHTON:

I cannot let your note, just received, go unanswered. I did not want to hurt your feelings, for you have been very careful of mine, but under the unfortunate circumstances there was nothing left for me to do but to write the note I did.

I wish you every success in life,—and somehow I feel that you will achieve success.

Very sincerely,

ALICE AMES.

(Sunday.)

Ashton did not reply to this note,—it needed no answer. And for the remaining three weeks of his stay he lazied it through the long days and slept fitfully through the nights.

The day before he was to go away, the hotel coach drove up to the door and Miss Ames and her mother alighted. He put his book closer to his eyes and pretended to see nothing.

Ten minutes later Miss Ames came on the porch. She looked around quickly,—Ashton and herself were the only persons there. She walked up to him and held out her hand. "I am glad to see you again," she said, simply.

He feigned not to see her hand and dropped his book, so as to give her time. When he had picked up the book, her hand was still outstretched.

"I trust your mother is better," he said.

"I am waiting for you to shake hands," she said.

"Oh, pardon me; I didn't see your hand."

"You did see it," she said.

He made no answer, but he shook her hand in a perfunctory way. Then

he stood facing her. For fully a minute the man and the woman stood there silent. He was very cool, very self-possessed,—she was embarrassed, restive.

"Why don't you say something?" she said, petulantly.

"What shall I say?"

"Anything,—say you're glad to see me again."

"That wouldn't be true," he answered, quietly. "You wrote me that I was to forget that we had ever met."

"But I want you to say something," she persisted. "I want you to tell me your side of the story."

"I never break my word," he answered.

"But you must in this case," she said, quickly.

"Must?" he said, coldly,—sneeringly, she thought.

"Yes,—must," and her lips were a-tremble and her breath came in little gasps. "I've heard horrible things,—terrible things,—and you must tell me your side of them. I'll believe you," she added, quickly. "I'll believe you. You must tell me."

"And why must I tell you?" he

asked in the same even tone that was habitual with him.

"Because you've hurt my pride; without saying it, you've made me feel that I'm in the wrong. I don't know why I feel that way, but I do. You've made me feel like a child that is being punished for something, and you've hurt my pride." She was almost on the verge of crying.

"And I have too much pride to tell you," he said, his head high in the air. "Let people say what they want of me,—let them believe what they wish, I won't contradict or even modify what you or any one may choose to hear of me. I made that promise and I won't break my word."

"To whom did you make the promise?"

"Myself," he said.

She looked at him critically, and there was something in her eyes then that should have made him speak,—that should have made him tell her, if not that which she had asked, another story that men have told women since the day that man and woman were born, and will tell until the earth has ceased to be.

THE PROPERTY OF THE NEW-YORK

"Listen," she said. "Please, please, tell me! Think the matter over. No, no, don't say you won't. If I see you after supper, will you tell me?"

He hesitated, and in that second she saw her advantage. She put her hand on his arm and looked up into his eyes, a strange light there,—"the light that is never seen on land or sea."

And a mighty struggle took place in the man then, and he found it hard to clear away the mist that was in his eyes. "If you see me after supper, I will tell you," he said, steadily.

She tried to say something, but could not. Instead, she ran quickly from him and up the stairs.

But he never told her, because he did not see her after supper, nor she him. He had said, "If you see me after supper, I will tell you"; and he had made it impossible for her to see him. He left the hotel within ten minutes of the time she had run up-stairs.

Which was very sad, possibly,—and possibly not. All stories can't end happily any more so than can all lives. And fairy-tales are only for children!

THE MAN IN THE CASE

OF course, there was a woman in the case. All the tragedies in the world, from the apple-tree episode to the present, have had their women. Incidentally, there's always a man in the case, but most chroniclers forget to mention him.

The woman in this present instance was passably plain, but she had knowledge and magnetism. She got at the kernel of things, and among the things she knew best were men.

Tom Benton first met her when he was a bachelor. She was sweeping the pavement in front of a tiny, unpretentious frame-built dwelling at Atlantic City, and not seeing him, had thrown much dust in his eyes. Apologies followed; her diction and modulation of voice contrasted strangely with her gingham and her menial position, and as Benton passed on he fell to wondering. And that night, by luck her gown caught on a nail in the boardwalk just as he

happened along in time to extricate her. And then she threw more dust in his eyes.

Her name was Cora Lentley. Ordinarily close-mouthed, to Benton she told much. She lived with her grandmother, she said. Grandma was a Russian, wealthy, peculiar, and had rented a little cottage in an out-of-the-way street at Atlantic City. Grandma never went out, and Cora did all the housework. Only three men ever called at the house, —the butcher, the baker, the milkman.

Unconventional acquaintances ripen fast, and as fast turn worthless. But here was an exception. For a month Benton and Miss Lentley were boon companions. Their tastes were identical, their logic ran to the same syllogism,—love, life, and death were all material bits that were immaterial.

One day she passed him with a tall, sinister-looking man in tow. The man said, "It must be done quickly," and the girl answered, "I'll catch the steamer to-morrow." Benton gave the conversation only a passing thought then. Later he thought it over.

That evening he read that a Captain Kolski, a well-known Russian, and who

stood high in the Russian police, was making a short stay at one of the well-known hotels. He intuitively connected Captain Kolski with the sinister man he had seen with Miss Lentley in the morning. Both were Russians, he argued, and so had tastes in common.

For three days he saw nothing of the Lentley woman. Then his morning paper enlightened him. The article was headed, "The Police Puzzled," and ran as follows:

"Mrs. Ivan Palitski, a Russian, was found dead in her bed this morning at 4956 Atlantic Avenue. The deceased had lived in the house for the past three months, her only companion being a domestic, who, finding her mistress dead, fled, no doubt, for fear of being arrested. There were no marks of violence on the body, and death was no doubt due to natural causes. Mrs. Palitski was arrested ten years ago in Moscow, charged with being a Nihilist, but owing to great political influence she was released and came to this country. No papers were found in the house when the police searched this morning, but her money and jewels were intact, showing that if foul play was meditated robbery was not the motive. The servant had evidently left the house last Monday, for Mrs. Palitski had been dead for several days."

When Benton had finished reading this piece of news he thought he had

had a surfeit of Atlantic City. And the afternoon train took him to Philadelphia.

Then the world jogged on much as it did before, and two years added their quota of wisdom to young Benton's already ample store. One day in June, while walking in Fairmount Park, almost the first person he encountered was the woman in the case,—Miss Cora Lentley.

She was strolling aimlessly near the bridge that spans the Schuylkill at the Zoological Gardens. Her brow was contracted, her lips puckered, her eyes intently following the tiny trail of water made by her parasol as she pushed it in front of her. Benton placed himself directly in her path and she bumped into him. His hat flew off, but he grabbed it in time to wave it gracefully at her just as she uttered an exclamation of surprised recognition.

"Why, Tom Benton!"

"Hullo, Cora Lentley. How's Russia?"

She looked up at him with a puzzled look on her face. "Russia?" she queried.

He laughed quietly. "Lovely day, isn't it?"

"What about Russia?" she repeated.

"I'm sure I don't know," he responded blandly, looking at her fixedly.

She returned his look, an innocent stare in her gray eyes. "No more do I," she said, simply. And there the matter rested until they had found a bench.

Then Benton returned to the charge. "Pity you were not at your grandmother's funeral," he said.

"I should have loved to have been there," she said, smilingly.

"The coroner's jury said heart failure caused her death," pursued Benton.

"Ah, what an intelligent class of men must have served on that jury. Were you one of them?"

"No," he answered, "or I might have brought in another verdict."

"What, pray?" and she leaned forward toward him, her eyes twinkling with merriment.

"I should have said," he answered, "that she died from the absorption of too much Nihilism."

"A second Daniel come to judgment,"

she said, and then burst out laughing. "You're awfully witty," she added. "You say so many humorous things in such a serious way."

Benton was silent for a moment. Then, "I'm no match for you. You are one of the women of the world, and they are more clever than the wisest philosopher."

"Tommy Benton, you're an unsophisticated boy," she began, as she leaned her elbow on her knees and rested her face on her hand. "You're rather clever, as men go; but men have their limitations. You have a good deal of backbone, and what you will you usually do. You make up your mind to do a certain thing, and then only after you've thought out all the pros and cons in the case. Then you do it. No power on earth could stop you doing it. Am I right?"

He nodded acquiescence.

"Well, here's a case where you've got to stop. To begin with, it's none of your business, and to end with—well, you wouldn't be ferreting the matter out very long before one of your friends would be trying to convince the police

that you came to your death from an overzealous regard for justice. You're much too young to die," and she looked at him critically.

"You've put the matter in a business-like way," said Benton. "If the Russian government wanted Mrs. Palitski put out of the way, why, the Russian government can get some one to do it; and, as you say, it's none of my business. Still, I didn't like your doing it."

"Who said I did, my poor, moralizing boy? Don't worry about me, Tommy Benton. Take care of your own dear neck." Then, after a few seconds' silence, "You know Browning?"

"A trifle," he said.

"Well," she went on, "Browning says, 'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls, and matter enough to save one's own.' Good deal of truth in that, isn't there?"

Instead of answering her question, Benton leaned close to her and said, "If I wasn't engaged to be married, I'd want you for a wife."

A quick flush spread over her face, leaving it whiter than before. She bit her lip and dug her nails into the palms

of her hand and a little tremor passed over her. "Don't talk nonsense, Tom. I'll never marry,—never see you again in life after to-day. I've a certain plan of action outlined for me to do and it's life work. You know we discussed love a couple of years ago at Atlantic City, and both came to the conclusion that it was a term only. Fools in general are divided into two classes. The first class comprises women who think they love men, and the second class is made up of men who think they love women. And all men and all women not of these classes are of the wise of the earth." She was looking out at the river, along whose surface a tiny breeze was playing. The eyes gave the brain a thought. "The lives that flow along the calmest only allow the breezes to ruffle up the surface. The depths are never sounded"

The dreamy somnolence of June was in the air, and Nature, prodigal of her charms, exhaled an odor redolent of gladness. Yet the woman's voice was freighted with sadness as she said, still in that dreamy way, "Helen of Troy, who overthrew men's hearts and Troy's walls, and Cleopatra, who changed the

world's complexion, were only grinning skeletons with a thin covering of pretty flesh. Yet you men build tragedies from women's prettiness and forget the skeleton that underlies it all."

"But, Cora——"

"No more, Tom. No love-making. I'll walk with you to the entrance to the Park, and there our paths for all time separate."

The walk was brief and Benton monopolized the conversation. At the Green Street entrance to the Park the woman held out her hand.

"Good-by for all time, Tommy Benton," she said. "Dig me out of your mentality and I'll forget you just as soon. Don't talk,—stop now,—for it will only prove to me what a foolish little boy you are."

And so she left him. He walked rapidly down Green Street, and the woman in the case looked after the "foolish little boy" several times and wiped her eyes each time she looked. The sun hurt one's eyes that day and made them water.

Tommy Benton's marriage in the fall was a brilliant one. Everybody who

was anybody was there, and, of course, the bride was the prettiest bride that any one ever saw. Likewise the presents were as handsome as anybody remembered to have seen, and half the invited folks thought he was too good for her and the other half thought she was far superior to him. But the fact remained that the young folks didn't marry any other persons than themselves.

Then six years sped around and Cupid grew tired of following Mr. and Mrs. Benton and went off to attend to other young folks. Benton was a bit more attentive than most married men and knew no club excuse, or had no business that kept him late at night. For six years he had never spent a night away from his wife. And one morning he woke up and came to the conclusion that he was horribly bored, that he wanted to be free, and that his love for his wife was a bit of Quixotic imagination.

With Benton a thought always produced action. The whole morning he thought the matter over, and then, partly to get away from his environment and partly for a change, he took the train

for New York. He walked around the city aimlessly until about three o'clock and then he walked to Central Park. A woman passed him and half turned. There was something familiar in her face and figure, and he walked after her.

"Cora," he called, and she turned to him smilingly.

She put out her hand and said, "I tried to avoid you, Tommy Benton, for both our good, but," and she gave a little sigh, "you have made that impossible now. I am not a fatalist, but this meeting isn't going to be productive of good," and she smiled again in that enigmatical way of hers.

"Let's sit down," said Benton, and they found a bench.

"Well," he said, after a long pause, "I am disillusionized. I woke up this morning and found that I was not in love with my wife. Possibly that was not the underlying thought, for the real fact of the case is that I want my freedom. Nature never cut me out to be a domestic man. I haven't as much sentiment, possibly, as the majority of men, but I will say that since I have been a married man I have always acted as

such. I want my freedom now, and you, Cora, must tell me how to get it."

She pursed up her lips and said, with some show of coquetry, "Me?"

"Yes," he said. "You. I am going to ask my wife to get a divorce. If she does not accept—well—your grandmother died suddenly, didn't she, and there weren't any marks of violence on the body?"

"There usually isn't any marks of violence on the body of one who has died a natural death," said the girl.

"Possibly not," he answered; "and I want my wife to either get a divorce or to die a natural death," and he looked at the girl fixedly.

The girl was silent for a little space. Then she said, "Why should I help you, Tom, to get an inoffensive woman out of the way?"

"Because," he answered, slowly, "I want another inoffensive woman to take her place."

"Who is she?" said the girl, quickly.

Their eyes met.

"You needn't ask," he said.

Her fingers were working nervously and the toe of her boot was describing

ungeometrical circles in the gravel as she answered, "I will help you."

He was trying hard to be calm, but his lips shook as he asked, "Can I meet you here Wednesday afternoon?"

"Yes," she answered, "and I will bring the drops with me. I have given up my position, Tom, and I am free to do as I choose now. Othello's occupation's gone, and I think I will take up marriage as a change." And then the woman in the case dropped the serious and began to be as other women, with the smile on her face hiding her thoughts. Benton took the 5.30 train for Philadelphia.

That night he and his wife were playing euchre. Benton was dealing. "Nan," he began, "I'm tired of married life. I want to be free. Will you get a divorce from me?"

There was a scared little look on her face as she glanced up at him.

"I'm perfectly sane, Nan, and terribly in earnest. I never will a thing unless I do it. You know me enough to understand that. I'll give you ground for divorce, and then you sue. Clubs are trump."

"It would kill me to sue for divorce, Tom."

"You'd better do it, Nan, for I mean to be free. You reneiged there. I played a club and you put a heart on it. Your mind's not on the game."

She played the hand out without speaking. Then when he had handed her the cards, she said, tremulously, "When do you want my decision?"

"To-night is Monday," he said; "say Wednesday morning, before I go to business."

"All right, Tom."

They played cards for a time, and then she took a book and he his paper.

She cried behind her book, but he read the stock reports carefully. Then they went to bed.

The next night they played cards again. She was very quiet, but she made many mistakes, and at last said she thought she'd go to bed, as she was so sleepy she couldn't tell one card from another.

"I'm sleepy, too," he said, "and a good night's sleep wont hurt me."

Just as they were about to retire, she asked as a favor that the window be

closed. "It's a trifle chilly for May," she explained, "and I've got a bad cold as it is."

He closed the window at once, and five minutes after they were in bed.

He was just about dozing off, when he heard her getting up. "What is it, Nan?"

"My throat is parched, Tom, and I want some water."

"Let me get it," he said, starting up.

"No, never mind, dear, I'm up now. The water is on the bureau here, and I'll light the gas a second."

She lit the gas, drank a tumblerful of water, and then put her hand over her heart, as if nerving herself for an ordeal.

Then she turned the light out and crept into bed again.

She put her arms around her husband and said, "Tom, dear, may I put my head on your chest to-night, and sleep as we used when we were first married?"

"Certainly, dear," he said; "only don't forget that you give me your answer to-morrow morning."

"I won't forget, Tom," she said.

And putting her head on his chest, she fell asleep, praying.

The next morning the cook smelled gas. For over an hour she smelled it, and then went up-stairs to investigate. When she came near the sleeping-apartment of her mistress, the cook's mental observation was that either Mr. or Mrs. Benton must have inadvertently left the gas on all night.

And so the coroner's jury decided. It was a very deplorable accident, said everybody, for the couple loved each other so. And the policeman, who opened the door when summoned by the cook, testified before the coroner that Mr. and Mrs. Benton looked like lovers, for he was smiling,—and her head was pillowed on his breast.

ANITA CORTEZ

IT was young Morgan's first appearance on any stage. The city editor wanted a two-column article on "Mrs. Bluebeard from Behind the Scenes," and Morgan was given the assignment. The press agent introduced him to the stage manager, who grunted a response, and then turned his attention to weightier matters.

The stage was dirty-looking; some scenery, backed up against the wall, appeared garish and cheap,—not at all so soft and beautiful as when seen from the front. A chorus girl brushed past Morgan; she was plastered with rouge and had two heavy black lines painted under her eyes. Her lashes were thick with some black stuff. And yet from his seat in the parquet the other night he had thought her beautiful beyond compare.

The play had already commenced and the comedian was capering around the stage with the soubrette. A crowd of men encased in brass armor leaned against a stone-painted wall, while some chorus

girls, gowned as peasants, were chatting and laughing a few feet away.

"What the devil are you girls gadding about over there?" came the voice of the stage manager. "I've told you a hundred times to stand in that second entrance and wait your cue there. I'll fine the whole crowd of you if I have to tell you again."

The girls moved in a matter-of-fact sort of way to the entrance designated. One of the girls, a light-haired little thing, stuck her tongue out when the stage manager's back was turned. "Cripps is an old crank," she said. The other girls laughed.

Young Morgan took a long breath. He was accustomed to profanity down at the office, but then there were no women there.

A burst of music, and the girls tripped on the stage, just as the comedian, panting and perspiring, came tumbling off. "I'm going to cut that dance to-morrow night, Cripps. It's too much exertion for a warm night."

"Cut your whole business for all I care," answered Cripps. "It's not my reputation you're making. The whole

blooming show can go to the devil as far as I am concerned."

The comedian yawned. "Got 'em again, Cripps?" was all he said.

Six girls came jostling off the stage. One of them stumbled against a bit of projecting scenery and tore a rent in her gown. "Who's got a pin? Who's got a pin?" she shouted.

Cripps heard her. "Tore your dress, did you? That'll cost you a dollar,—help you to be not so careless, too. Take the dress to Mrs. Ward after this scene and tell her to mend it."

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Cripps. I hurt my side against the scene, too. I've got enough to put up with without being fined."

"Can't help how the devil you did it," was Cripps unfeeling rejoinder. "You girls come off that scene like a pack of frightened sheep. Take your time. Nobody's chasing you. Here, Gadsby, mind your lights. Quick now,—out lights,—down with that drop! Shove that wing around more,—so, so,—that's enough! Don't take all night with that table! This is a quick change, not a funeral! Get out of the way, you fool

reporter! Push that chair on stage! Now up lights,—up lights for the love of heaven, and be quick about it!" And up went the lights as suddenly as they went out, and Morgan heard a burst of applause from the front as the "Exterior of the King's Palace" gave away in fifteen seconds to "A Room in Bluebeard's Castle." The girls were rushing up the narrow wooden stairs for a change of costume,—armored knights were running past him toward the stage, —the orchestra was playing a wild fanfare,—the stage manager was looking at his watch and grinning triumphantly.

"Made the change in four seconds quicker time than last night," he said.

"Have you a pin, please?" Morgan turned. It was the girl with the tear in her gown.

The reporter gave her a pin. "The stage manager's not gracious to-night," he said.

"Same as usual," she answered. "He doesn't change much. That's his daughter over there," and she swept her arm vaguely toward a crowd of girls who were sitting on a flight of red steps.

"The one with the pink ribbon in her hair?" asked Morgan.

"No; that's the comedian's wife, Mrs. Winters. The girl with the yellow tights is Minnie Cripps. She and the comedian's wife are as thick as thieves. They don't love me and I don't love them. Some day I'll get even with them,—Mrs. Winters first, though."

"You're Spanish?" asked Morgan, looking at her lustrous hair and dark, Spanish eyes.

"Yes; my name is Anita Cortez."

"I remember you now. You do a Spanish dance around a dagger stuck in the stage."

"Yes; and if it wasn't for that dance Mrs. Winters and I—oh, well, I'll tell you after the show. Going anywhere after the show? No? Well, the curtain drops at 10.54 o'clock, and it takes me about twenty minutes to get out. I'll meet you in the ladies' saloon at the café around the corner at 11.20. I have to go up-stairs and dress for the second act now. When I come down I'll show you my dagger. It is a beauty, full of jewels, and I can throw it fifty feet and hit a bull's-eye. There goes

the curtain down on the first act. I'm late!" And she darted up the stairs.

Then there was pushing and shoving and hauling and hoisting, as the coatless scene-shifters began setting the scenes for the second act. The orchestra leader came through a little door that led up from under the stage. Cripps caught sight of him.

"Don't give an encore for the opening chorus to-night, Betterton. We're four minutes late now on the first act. It's twenty-one of ten."

"All right," answered the orchestra leader. "There's a fine house out front." Then, after a pause, "Say, Cripps, I don't want to interfere, but that Cortez woman is flirting with every man in the house again. She's got my first violin daft. He made two discords just because he can't keep his eyes off her."

"I warned that Cortez minx two weeks ago that I'd fire her. The two weeks are up to-night,—and she goes. I guess she knows it, too, for she's been looking ugly,—confound her!" He pulled out his watch. "We're ready for you, Betterton." And as the orchestra leader disappeared through the little

door Cripps called up-stairs, "All down for the second act."

A few minutes later the curtain went up on the second act. Cripps was swearing as usual, and a sensitive chorus girl was crying because he had merely called her "a waddling hog," and had threatened to fine her if she didn't walk with her head up in the air, and not down on her chest, "as if she was rooting for walnuts." The act was half over when Morgan saw Anita Cortez coming down the wooden steps. At the foot of the steps stood the comedian's wife, May Winters. Her back was toward Anita. In a second the dancer had drawn a dagger from her belt,—another second and she took a quick look around. No one but Morgan observed her; she saw that he was looking at her, and so she threw a kiss to him. Then, like a flash, the dagger flew through the air and buried itself to the hilt in May Winters's back. Simultaneous with her shriek came a cry from the dancer, as she deliberately tumbled down the steps, landing on top of the wounded woman. With the quickness of lightning she pulled the dagger

from the quivering flesh and sprang to her feet.

"My God!" she cried. "My God! Cripps, come here. My foot slipped on the stairs and the dagger flew out of my hands, wounding May Winters, and—oh, my foot's sprained and there's my cue!" And with a limp she bounded on the stage and, throwing the dagger, dripping with blood, point downward, she danced around it like a wild thing; while the audience, moved by her frenzy, rose and cheered again and again at her tempestuous and whirlwind-like entrance.

Behind the scenes a different part was being played. The wounded woman was carried into a near-by dressing-room and the stage carpenter had sped up the street for a doctor. Winters, the comedian, was staunching the flow of blood with his cap. The woman was unconscious.

"She did it on purpose," said Cripps. "That fall of hers was a regular stage fall,—you can't fool me."

"I don't think it was done purposely," said Winters, unsteadily. He bent his head and the tears slowly rolled down his cheeks and fell on the pink tights of

the hurt woman. Cripps walked to the door and went out; he whistled softly to himself.

The doctor arrived just as Cripps came to the door again: "Hurry up, Winters, —your cue."

"By heaven, Cripps, I can't sing a topical song now."

"It's your bread and butter out front there. Your wife's in that room. You can't help her by staying. Better look after your bread and butter."

The perspiration stood in big beads on Winters's face. Cripps half led, half pushed him toward the stage. "Your hand's full of blood; wipe it on the wings as you go past," he said, quietly.

And so Winters went capering on the stage and sang and laughed and made the audience almost wild with delight; and the doctor in the dressing-room looked grave and tried to stop the flow of blood.

After he had sung three verses he darted from the stage and was in the dressing-room. Anita Cortez was helping the doctor.

"I'm very sorry about the accident, Mr. Winters," said the dancing-girl,

calmly. "I've lost my position by it. Cripps has discharged me."

Winters looked at her and set his teeth. She looked at him and smiled. "Accidents will happen, you know," and she sighed. "Can I be of any further assistance, doctor?"

"I think not," he answered.

She walked to the door. "Good-by, Winters," she said, without turning her head. Noiselessly she opened the door and went out.

Winters dropped on his knees beside his wife. "Well?" he interrogated, looking up at the doctor.

"Unless there's an internal hemorrhage she's all right. I think, though, she'll pull through. Have some one ring for an ambulance. She'll be better at the hospital than at home."

Young Morgan walked into the ladies' café at the saloon around the corner. Anita Cortez was sitting at a table. She looked handsomer off than on the stage.

"You're late," she said.

"Yes," he answered. "The manager kept me there making me promise

not to use the story,—it would hurt the show. And so I promised, though the city editor would kill me if he knew I had the story and didn't use it. What will you have to drink?"

"I'm not hungry," she answered. "Another thing,—I didn't ask you here to eat and drink. I want to tell you a story. Once upon a time—that's the way all nice stories begin, you know. Oh, but this isn't a nice story at all, so it must begin differently. Once there was a dancer, and she joined a burlesque company. There was a man in it, a comedian, whom she knew some years before. But they had certain reasons for not allowing other people to know this, so he treated her as coolly as she treated him,—that is, when any one was looking."

"Ah, I see now," said Morgan.

"No, you don't, my dear boy. Let me continue. This comedian was married to one of the chorus girls,—had been married recently, too. This hurt the other woman's pride, for the man had sworn his love for her long before he had met the pretty blonde. But she didn't want the man now. She was too

proud, and she had also outgrown her liking, or loving, call it what you will. See that table over by the door? Well, three days ago the comedian came in here after the matinée. The other woman—well, I was the other woman—was sitting at that table alone. No one else was in the room. He came over to me and begged me to leave the company. His wife was jealous of me. Women grow jealous intuitively. I refused to leave the company. He got on his knees to beg me. Just then enter his wife. She marched up to the table, called me every vile name in the calendar, and before I had an inkling of what she intended to do she slapped my face. I was on my feet in an instant, but Winters came between us and got his wife down-stairs. I swore I'd be even with her, and I have been."

"But," said Morgan, "if you'll pardon me saying so, don't you think she was justified in slapping your face?"

Anita Cortez laughed.

"What a guileless boy you are!" she said. "I'll tell you another story,—a shorter one. Suppose a man marries a woman, and in six months he tires of

her and leaves her to starve. Then suppose he marries another woman a year or so afterwards. Wife No. 2 finds her husband with wife No. 1, and slaps No. 1's face. Now, legally, if there was any slapping to be done, the first wife would have the right, wouldn't she? Well, the first wife didn't slap,—she stabbed. Will you kindly help me on with my coat?"

MRS. ROGERS'S DOLL-BABY

WHEN young Frederick Rogers fell in love with Helen Benton he made up his mind to try to curb his appetite for bachelor pursuits before he asked Miss Benton to become Mrs. Rogers. He wasn't at all sure that she would accept him; he understood the risk he was running in unfettering himself from the pleasures of single blessedness and leaving that territory before he was positive of entering the matrimonial state. Yet, on the other hand, he argued, it would be unfortunate did she accept him, and he still craved the excitement of Bohemian companionship, late hours and unconventional friends.

So he gravely announced to the Poker Club that he would meet them only once a week instead of twice weekly, as was his custom; he told the florist not to send the prima donna any more flowers on each Monday night, and he went to bed at one o'clock sharp every morning.

Then, to train his mind for domesticity, he carefully scrutinized every article in his two rooms in an attempt to pick flaws that needed rectification. He found, with much astonishment, that the spigot in the stationary washstand absolutely refused to turn completely off and that water ran from it constantly. He reasoned that this state of affairs must have been in vogue since he moved in six months previous, and the fact that he had discovered the leakage gave him an immense amount of pleasure, and prompted the remark made by him at the next meeting of the Poker Club. "Fellows," said he, "marriage helps a man in more ways than one. He takes more note of things as a Benedict than he does as a bachelor."

"Yes, indeed," answered Drummond, who was dealing, "marriage opens a man's eyes wonderfully."

And, indeed, not a week passed from the time that Rogers discovered the leaking spigot until the time of his writing to his landlord concerning it. His epistle was thoroughly characteristic.

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My dear Mr. James (it ran):

The sprinting abilities of the spigot in my room are wonderful. The said spigot began running six months ago, and shows no signs of fatigue. As I fear it will wear itself out in such herculean endeavor, kindly send a man at once to stop it.

Sincerely,

Frederick Rogers.

When Rogers finished this epistle he made up his mind that his training for the matrimonial state was complete. And so he went direct to Miss Benton's house, proposed and was accepted.

In six months they were married and moved into a house, the coziness of which made up for its lack of magnitude. The young Mrs. Rogers could not quite decide whether she would have a boudoir and no domestic, or a domestic and a dressing-room. She decided in favor of the latter. She wanted the boudoir badly, but she was satisfied with the English name for it and an Irish attendant to look to it.

To Rogers it seemed that the world was a miniature painting in a gold frame, the painting containing himself and wife, and the frame being the little home over which they both held sway.

Meeting one of the Poker Club members one day while the latter was hurrying along with a beautiful edition of Boswell's "Johnson," Rogers said, "Do you know I'm disgusted with Rasselas? The idea of that man hunting all over for happiness when he could have had it by merely getting married."

Three months of azure skies and perfumed air, and then a tragedy. The Rogers were out driving one day and the horse took fright. The crazed animal started at a terrific pace down the road. To the right and left the carriages gave way, while Rogers's grip and his frantic efforts to curb the horse were futile. There was a bend in the road, and Mrs. Rogers put her face close to her husband to tell him something,—and then darkness came on from somewhere, somehow.

It seemed to him but two minutes afterwards that he opened his eyes. He was in his own room, and a man whom he had never seen before was bending over him.

"I fell, didn't I?" asked Rogers, weakly.

"Yes, you had an ugly fall. Base

of the brain was hit, and that made you unconscious for three hours. Didn't fracture a particle, though, and you'll be as right as a May morning in a day. You'll be dizzy, though."

"And my wife?"

"Can't tell that, sir, for a couple of hours. Dr. Mull is in with her now."

"But she'll live, man? Tell me she'll live."

"Yes, she'll live; but—but she will never be a mother."

And then the doctor busied himself pouring some white powder into a glass of water. This Rogers drank, and in a few minutes sank into a heavy slumber.

When he again awoke the sweet, pungent odor of ether assailed his nostrils. There was no one in the room with him and he struggled to his feet, while the room swam around and the bandage on his head thumped like a battering-ram.

Straight toward his wife's room he went. The door was closed, but he pushed it open noiselessly and entered. She lay there, white as marble, her eyes closed. Beside the bed sat a trim little nurse in white cap and apron.

"Asleep?" he whispered, pointing toward the bed.

The nurse smiled and nodded her head "yes"; then she motioned for him to leave the room.

He did as she bade him, but not before he had tiptoed over to the bed and gently and tenderly kissed his wife's pillow.

It was four days before the doctor allowed him to get up, four weeks before Mrs. Rogers was permitted to leave her bedroom. And then life jogged on as before, save that the husband was transformed into the lover and anticipated each thought, humored each whim of his wife.

They never talked of the subject of children, though in a thousand little ways the husband knew what thought was continually uppermost in his wife's mind. She never passed a baby-carriage but what she turned and looked after the little occupant,—never passed a crowd of ragged urchins on the street but that she would stop and pat one of them on the head.

Outwardly she was happy. To dances, teas, the theatre, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers would often go, and her face, when he

was near, was always wreathed in smiles; yet he knew, and had tact enough to pretend he did not.

A couple of weeks before Christmas young Mr. Rogers brought home a bulky package and laid it gleefully down on the sitting-room table. "I brought quite the prettiest doll I ever saw, Helen," he said. "I thought your sister Katie would like it for Christmas."

"Let me see it, Fred," asked his wife, and Rogers carefully untied the bundle, disclosing to view the very prettiest doll that ever was turned out of a French workshop. It had a waxen face, but a very undoll-like expression, with hair of a chestnut hue that fell in pretty ringlets all over its head.

Its eyes were blue, and by tipping her dollship to an angle of forty-five degrees the eyes closed and the doll was to all intents and purposes fast asleep. It had little red kid shoes, was attired in a blue silk gown, and had underwear of a fineness very much superior to that affected by the average doll.

Mrs. Rogers gazed at the doll as it lay on the table. Then very slowly she picked it up and looked at it. She held

it out at arm's length, and then very tenderly drew it toward her and kissed it. Then she laid it in her arms as if it were a baby, and said softly to her husband, "She is very beautiful, Fred."

He noticed that her eyes were welling up with tears. In a moment he had her in his arms, and she was crying on his shoulder, holding meanwhile the doll that wore the dainty red shoes and whose hair fell in pretty ringlets all over its head.

That night she took the doll to bed with her, and the next morning young Mr. Rogers could hardly believe his ears when Helen, his wife, asked if she couldn't keep the doll.

"What in the world would you do with a doll, Helen?"

"Oh, nothing much, Fred," she answered, sadly, "but it would make the days pass while you are away, and it would give me something to love. I—I can make—make believe, you know."

That night when Mr. Rogers came home his wife ran to greet him with the doll in one hand and a bit of cloth in the other. "Oh, Fred," she cried, "I'm making Mabel a new gown! I ripped

up my old brown cloth to-day,—my going-away dress, you know,—and I took a little piece of it for Mabel?"

"Mabel? Mabel? Who is Mabel?" queried he.

"Oh, I forgot," she answered in a crestfallen way and looking down at the carpet. "I named it Mabel."

"It?" he asked, and then his face showed understanding. "The doll, you mean?"

"Yes," she said. Her boot was trying to make a hole in the carpet.

He rose to the occasion beautifully: "Mabel is an awfully pretty name, dear, and I'm very glad indeed that the doll is giving you so much pleasure."

She flung her arms around his neck. "It's almost real, Fred, dear," she said, timidly, looking up into his face the while; and he stroked her head and told her that she was the dearest little wife in the world.

At the supper-table she rattled on like a magpie. Her cheeks had a color in them Rogers never remembered having seen for many a long day, while her eyes sparkled, and she seemed transformed in one day from a woman fading away

with a hidden grief to a gladsome, sprightly, joy-reflecting girl.

After supper he sat and watched her deft fingers mould a brown gown to the doll's form. "She's got a pretty figure, hasn't she?" he said.

"Perfectly beautiful," answered Mrs. Rogers, enthusiastically.

"I suppose," he went on, "that I'd better get Katie another doll."

"Not like this one, Fred?" she asked, quickly, while a look of pain shot across her face.

"No, indeed," he answered, noting her anxiety; "quite different from our Mabel. A bisque doll, I think."

"Yes; get her a bisque one. There must not be another one in the world like Mabel."

As time went on Mabel's outfit grew in proportion to the love showered upon her by her grown-up care-taker.

Mrs. Rogers always bought the materials and made every stitch of clothing that the inanimate bit of wax wore. Nothing ready-made was purchased, for Mrs. Rogers's chief pleasure consisted in turning dressmaker or milliner for the doll that was to her her baby.

Certainly no mother ever loved her offspring as did Mrs. Rogers the adopted doll. She would disrobe it every night and put on it a night-dress that was as dainty and snowy white as a bit of thistle-down. At meals Mabel sat beside her, and if Mr. and Mrs. Rogers took a short trip, one of Mrs. Rogers's gowns was left at home in order that Mabel could be safely packed in the grip.

For over a year the doll-baby ruled the Rogers household. Then, one night, Mr. Rogers came home and found the sitting-room dark and his wife not in her accustomed place in the arm-chair, with Mabel on her lap.

He went quickly up-stairs and into his wife's bedroom. She was lying prone upon the bed, clutching Mabel in her arms and crying as if her heart would break.

"What's the matter, Helen? Are you sick,—is any one dead?" he cried.

She tried to speak to him, but her voice would not come.

"What is it, dear?" he pleaded.

"Mab—Mabel—is—is—de—dead," she sobbed.

"What do you mean?"

"She—was—was burnt—to—to—

death;—I—dropped—her in—the—fi—fi—fire."

He took the doll from her arms and noted the wreckage. Mabel's face was certainly entirely gone, and resembled a ball of colored wax, through the centre of which one blue eye, Cyclops-like, gazed terribly forth. Her left arm was a stump, and a tuft of hair stuck grotesquely out from a spot where Mabel's pinky ear once claimed attention.

"How did it happen, dear?" asked Rogers.

"I—was making doughnuts for you—and—and Mabel fell on the hot coals. I—I—caught at her, but—missed her, and then, in trying to—to get her out, I burn—burned my hands awfully."

He lifted her up in his arms and looked at her hands. They were terribly burned, red and swollen.

He lit the gas and hurried down-stairs for some sweet oil. In ten minutes her hands were bandaged.

Then she sent him away. All he could do to comfort her was of no avail. She wanted to be left alone,—wanted him to go down-stairs and get his supper.

Rogers left the room and slowly went back to the sitting-room.

It seemed to him that the food did not taste right, nor the gas burn right, nor the room look as it used to look. Everything seemed changed from the night before.

For a long time he looked into the heart of the fire. "I wonder," he said, slowly, "why the maternal instinct was put in a woman's breast when she can't satisfy that instinct?"

And then as he sat there another thought came to him. "What a fool I was not to have said that to her!" he said, softly. Then he bounded up-stairs.

His wife was sitting on the rocker, the scarified remains of the doll resting on her lap. The tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"Helen, dear, what a fool I was not to tell you sooner! I'll go off the very first thing in the morning and buy a doll exactly like Mabel." His voice had a triumphant ring in it as if he had just made a wonderful discovery.

"No use, dear," she said, sadly. "I don't want any more babies. None would be the same to me. This was

my first, you know. You don't understand me, Fred. I can't help being silly, dear, but Mabel was such a comfort. Please, please leave me, Fred. Let me stay by Mabel for a little time. She was my first, dear. And you can't understand,—oh, you can't understand!"

And so she sat crying quietly over the baby that was gone,—her first, her last, and only one that was to be.

THE WIND-UP OF BOHEMIA

BROOKE'S flat consisted of three rooms. You entered what he termed his "study" through the hall door and this room led into another by an arch. Running off from this second room—he called it his loafing-place—was his bedroom. He always kept the bedroom door locked,—principally because people dropped in on him at all hours, and he held that it didn't look exactly nice to have one's parlor next door to one's bedroom, even if one did live in a flat.

Brooke lived in Bohemia,—and this Bohemia was in the very heart of sedate Philadelphia. It wasn't the Bohemia of the half starved and the unshaven,—the Bohemia of long hair and nasty speech. It was merely the Bohemia of congeniality and unconventionality,—a gathering together of clever folk of both sexes, who did and said pretty much what they pleased, who borrowed from and loaned to each other various small

sums of money and never bothered about making a memorandum of it,—the Bohemia where one's secret belonged to the crowd and went no farther. As clever Jean Travers once summed it up: "You can go to Brooke's rooms, meet a lot of jolly people, have all you want to eat and drink, laugh a good deal, and never hear anything out of the way."

It was ten minutes of eight on a sultry June night when into Brooke's room sauntered Monteith.

"Hullo, Ben, have the things come yet?"

"What things?" asked Brooke.

"The eatables,—ordered them sent around at 7.30. The crowd will be here to-night,—Fales, Alec Drummond, Bates, Kate Rhodes, Etta, Fanny Locke, and maybe Jean Travers. She's doing a turn up at one of the resorts along the river drive,—I forget which one,—and she said she won't be able to get down before 10.30. You owe me two dollars and eighteen cents as your share of the stuff."

Brooke dove down into his pockets and gave Monteith the money.

"Monty, old man," he said, seriously, "I'm getting tired of Bohemia. To-night will be my last night at it."

"Getting religion?" queried Monteith, lighting a cigarette.

"No; getting sensible," answered Brooke.

"Get lots of it, Ben,—it'll do you good. Hullo, there goes the bell,—guess it's the fodder."

Into the room trooped Fales, Fanny Locke, and Kate Rhodes, their arms full of packages. "Found them down on the hat-rack, Ben," said Kate Rhodes, "so we constituted ourselves a catering committee of three. Dump 'em on the table, Fanny."

Helter-skelter on the table went the packages,—boned chicken, rolls, olives, cavaire, de brie, crackers, ground coffee, butter, and canned tongue.

"Why didn't you have the sense, Monty," said Kate Rhodes, fanning herself with her hat, "to get some strawberries?"

"Whoever heard of strawberries going with cavaire?" asked Fales, witheringly.

"Strawberries are not so preciously exclusive but what they may go with

whomever or whatever they please," shot back Kate. "I've known them to consort with pickles,—and it was my dear mouth that brought the two together."

"Wasn't the combination painful, Kate?" smiled Brooke.

"Not to my mouth, Ben."

Etta Andrews came panting up the stairs just then, and she greeted the crowd with a wave of her hand and, "Phew! isn't to-night a broiler?" Then she fell into a chair and, nodding over to Fales, said, "Jack, pour me out a cold glass of beer and you may have a kiss."

"I don't have to take it, do I, Etta?" asked Fales, with a mock resigned look.

"No, dear; I'll give it to you,—and pay in advance," and she jumped from the chair, and, running over to him, threw her arms around his neck and planted a resounding smack on his lips. "I suppose you know I left Jackson & Company yesterday," she whispered. "I'm at Frank & Faires,—ribbon counter."

"Tell me all about it," said Fales. And the pair sat down on the sofa to talk it over,—not, however, before he'd poured out a cold glass of beer and

she'd nodded to the rest and said, "Gesundheit, folks."

Meanwhile, Fanny Locke had gone to the refrigerator and, assisted by Monteith and Kate, was making high-balls, she insisting, however, on squirting the seltzer because she liked the sound of the siphon.

"*Puck* accepted two of my drawings last week, Monty," she said, "and I finished a man to-day that is perfectly grand."

"Here's to the man you finished," said Monteith, holding up his glass. "Your health, you strong and mighty Amazon."

"What have you been doing lately, Kate?" asked Brooke.

"Oh, going out to the Park and painting daisies that looked scared half to death," she answered. "I sold a little study of roses last week, but somehow or other I can't make a daisy look like a respectable member of society. I got a big bunch of them, tied them on my easel, and then attempted to transfer them to canvas. When I'd finished—well, the painting looked a study of Rip Van Winkle's beard after

Rip had been eating hard-boiled eggs and wasn't particular where the yolks went."

Brooke laughed heartily. "Here's your health, Kate, and may all your daisies hereafter look like buttercups in a field of milk."

"Drink hearty," she said, and they clinked glasses.

Alec Drummond and Bates came in at this juncture, and Drummond shied his hat over at Etta Andrews, who promptly kicked it under the table.

Bates had a parcel in his hand, a bulky package, wrapped in what looked to be a newspaper.

"What's that, Bates?" asked Brooke.

"The *War Cry*, my son. I bought it from a cadaverous-looking man who looked as if he needed money."

"The *War Cry* may be the wrapper," said Etta Andrews, "but what's in it?"

"Useful information, my dear Etta, as to how to avoid the Evil One,—that's what's in it; and a very good paper it is."

"Bates, you're positively brilliant to-night," rejoined Etta. "Will you kindly inform me as to the nature of the beast you have wrapped up in that *War Cry?*"

"Certainly, Etta dear, since you be-

seech so plaintively," answered Bates. "The monster imprisoned here happens to be several. Behold!" and he deftly caught one end of the paper and allowed the contents to fall to the floor.

"Frankfurters!" shrieked Etta in a gurgle of delight, and she scrambled on the floor and collected the different links. "Fourteen of them," she said.

"Fifteen," said Bates.

Etta counted again. "Fourteen links, my boy."

"I brought in fifteen," said Bates. "You've lost one. Behold, I shall emulate Darwin and hunt for the missing link," and Bates dropped to his knees and presently found the sausage peacefully reposing under the table in Drummond's hat.

Brooke brought out the chafing-dish, and the rest of the crowd busied themselves with opening cans, bringing out plates, knives, forks, spoons, etc. Brooke wanted coffee, so Kate started the kettle on the five o'clock tea-stand.

"Who's bartender?" asked Drummond, plaintively.

"Listen to the Czar of all the Russias," said Fanny Locke, scornfully.

"Alec, dear, if you want a drink, wait on yourself."

"Any ginger ale in the refrigerator, Ben?" asked Drummond.

"I think there are a couple of bottles, Alec. Go hunt and take them away from the intoxicating crowd against whom they're nestling. I'm busy boiling eggs."

"I never tasted better boiled eggs than Ben cooks," said Bates. "You're a past master at hard-boiled eggs, Ben. I never saw your equal. What's your recipe?"

"Oh," answered Brooke, with a twinkle in his eyes. "I put them in boiling water and let them stay there until you make a brilliant remark. They're in there so long they're bound to be hard."

Bates joined in the general laugh. "That's as hard on me as on the eggs," he said.

And so the good-humored chaff went round until about half-past ten a low, peculiar whistle was heard from the street.

"That's our whistle," said Fales. "Who is it?"

Brooke looked from the window and

answered the whistle. "It's Jean Travers," he said, and he went down to the door to let her in.

"I think Brooke likes Jean rather well," said Alec Drummond.

"And why shouldn't he?" asked Kate.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Drummond, musingly.

"Shouldn't he like her just because you do, Alec?" asked Etta, pointedly.

"I take that as a compliment, Etta. The fact that I should like that which Ben Brooke does shows me to be a man of taste and judgment."

And just then Jean Travers entered. "I came on my wheel, people, because that was the quickest way of getting through the Park. Is my costume too abbreviated?"

"I hope your visit, dear, will be longer than your skirt," said Benny Brooke, bowing.

Jean Travers turned toward him, a flush on her face, her eyes sparkling. "You have such a pretty way, Ben, of saying nasty things that I think of the prettiness and forget the nastiness."

"Which shows what a born philosopher you are, Jean," said Monteith.

"Not born so, Monty,—I've acquired it since I went on the stage, and it's been a mighty expensive acquisition. I'm hungry as a bear,—what have you got to eat?"

"Devour me, my dear," said Fales, falling on his knees in front of her. "I'm a true apostle of sweetness and light and I know you have a sweet tooth. Eat me up in little pieces,—but begin by tasting my lips.

"Get up, Jack," said Jean; "you'd prove too indigestible a morsel for my delicate palate. For, if reports do not belie you, you're rather tough."

"He'd be tender enough if you'd give him a chance," laughed Drummond. "Wouldn't he, Etta?"

"After I get finished roasting him he will," she said, significantly.

And Fales took the hint and sat down beside Etta.

Fanny Locke and Monteith were arguing whether it were harder for an artist to make an illustration for a joke or to fit a joke to a certain illustration; Fales and Etta were discussing the fairness of only allowing a girl three-quarters of an hour for lunch instead of an hour; Bates

was telling Kate Rhodes how he admired the daisies she painted, and Alec Drummond and Benny Brooke were listening to Jean Travers explain her latest dance to them.

The groups broke in ten or fifteen minutes, and, like the tiny glasses in a kaleidoscope, new groups were formed. Jest followed on the heels of jest, sally and quip and wit followed faster than the mind could note. It was a commingling of good-fellowship,—there was nothing boisterous or vulgar. When one grew hungry, one helped one's self to the good things on the table; when one grew thirsty, the refrigerator was handy. The girls smoked cigarettes and drank copious cups of coffee, and not for one minute did the good-humored banter cease.

All on a sudden Fales looked out the window. "It is the morn herself," he said. "By Jove, folks, it's ten minutes of four."

"Shades of our ancestors, girls, let's get the dishes washed!" said Jean Travers. And in a jiffy plates were emptied and the dishes trotted over to the bath-room and washed.

Fales was going to take Etta home, Fanny Locke and Monteith lived within a block of each other, and Bates had told Kate Rhodes if she'd pay the car fare he'd take her home, for he'd spent his last cent on the frankfurters and the *War Cry*. Drummond had rooms in the square below, and Brooke told Jean Travers he'd take her home just so soon as he got on his knickerbockers.

They waited for Brooke at the front door. There the party split, and Brooke and Jean Travers pedaled along.

"Instead of going home, Jean," said Brooke, "what do you say to an early morning spin in the Park? The sun will be up in half an hour."

"Agreed," said Jean.

Within twenty minutes they were on the River Drive, speeding along like two heralds of the dawn. When they'd reached Rockland, Brooke said, "Suppose we dismount, Jean. I want to talk to you."

They found a bench and sat down, just as the sun showed his face in a shamed way, as if he'd been caught napping and was getting up late.

"Well, Ben?" she queried.

"Well, Jean, I'm going to give up Bohemia. I didn't say anything to the crowd to-night because I thought it might act as a wet blanket. But I'm going to give it up."

"Why, my boy?"

"Well, for a time it fascinated me, Jean. I like clever people, like to hear them talk, like to rub my brains against theirs and have my wits stirred a bit. But what does it all amount to?"

"What does anything amount to?" asked the girl, wearily.

"Lots of things, Jean, have something substantial back of them. Bohemia has absolutely nothing. We sit and drink and eat until daylight comes, and then we're totally unfit for any sort of work that day. And then it isn't right,—it isn't right for you—for girls, I mean—to come down to my rooms."

Jean Travers caught her breath hard. "Why, Ben, dear, there's never been the slightest disrespect shown to any of us down there. If I'd thought for one minute that you'd think any the less of me for having come down there——" She stopped suddenly and covered her face with her hands.

"There, there, Jean," said Brooke, gently, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I know you're a good woman, but the other evening, at my sister's, I described one of our Bohemian evenings, and my sister said some things that set me thinking. And I couldn't bear to have her or any one think lightly of you."

The girl raised her head quickly. "You didn't mention my name to her, Ben? You didn't tell her I was at your rooms?"

"There!" cried Brooke, in an instant; "by that speech of yours you see the truth of what I am telling you,—you've no right to come there."

The girl was silent, thinking. Then she shook her head slowly in the affirmative. "Ben, dear," she began, "I've seen the seamy side of life. I dance and sing in a beer garden, so I can make money in the summer and keep adding to my little bank account. And then when the regular season opens I have a little nest-egg if things go wrong. Yet, in that beer garden there is no taint, for I'm myself; and, after all, it's for ourselves we must answer. Bohemia is a

life in itself. It's a jolly comradeship; it's sexless; it's honest. Compare our little evening we have just lived through with an evening company among your social equals. One woman vies with another in her gowning; they say nasty, catty things of and to each other. The men are cliquey. Now, take our Bohemia; it's honest,—not a mean word escapes, not a sentence that might hurt. Do you wonder that it appeals to us girls? That it touches us, because it is the one place we can unbend and be free and not have our actions misconstrued?"

It was Benny Brooke's turn to be silent. After a little while he said, "There's another reason for my giving up Bohemia, Jean,—I'm going away."

"Where?" she asked quickly, putting her hand on his arm.

"Oh, I don't know exactly," he said, uneasily; "but I'm going somewhere where I can make more money."

"I've two hundred dollars, Ben, that I haven't a particle of use for; take it, won't you, and—and—and stay in the city? Give up Bohemia,—yes, we'll both give it up; but stay in the city, won't you?"

He looked down at her flushed, eager face, and his arm stole around her waist, and he drew her to him gently and kissed her. "Jean, dear, I must go away," he said.

Her head was buried in his chest, but she lifted it ever so little and peeped up at him through tearful eyes. "Why must you go away, Ben?" she whispered.

"Well, I've lost my position on the paper. I've no prospects ahead, and I want some money before I ask a certain girl a certain question. So I'm going away, Jean, dear, to find the money." There was a ring of pathos in his voice, and the girl noted it.

"Couldn't you," she whispered,— "couldn't you ask the girl the question before you went away? Couldn't you ask her now."

"It wouldn't be fair to her," he said, quickly; "she might have to wait years."

"If I loved a man," she said, "I'd wait a lifetime for him."

"Will you wait for me, dear?" he said, gently, bending closer to her.

He could feel her tremble from head to foot. "Oh, Ben, Ben!" she sobbed, —and that was her answer.

AN EVERY-DAY CASE

SERGEANT OF POLICE REYNOLDS, Forty-eighth District, tilted back his chair, put his hands behind his head, and, looking up at the station house clock, sighed wearily.

"Show her in, Smithers," he said, "but tell her I'm a very busy man, and that, as it's eleven o'clock at night now, I can't give her much time. Don't forget to take a squad of twelve men up with you to-morrow morning to Kater Street. That murder and suicide case has made a lot of talk, and there'll be a mob of curious people at the funeral. So you'd better take twelve men to handle the crowd. Now show the woman in."

A half-minute later there was a timid knock at the door. "Come in," called Sergeant Reynolds. A young woman of twenty-three years, a baby in her arms, came shrinking into the room.

"I've come to see if you couldn't find John for me," she said.

"Husband?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did you see him last?"

"Day before yesterday, sir,—the day Mr. Henty killed his wife and then committed suicide, sir. I live next door to them."

"And your husband went away that day?"

"Yes, sir,—just before the Hentys began to quarrel."

"Why did he go away? Another woman?"

"God bless you, sir, no. He was a good man, was John, and he'd been out of work for some time, and said he was going to find something to do that morning, even if it was only selling papers. And—and—me and the baby haven't seen—seen—him yet." And two big tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"Sit down," said Sergeant Reynolds, "and give me a description of John."

"Well, sir, I can't say as I can describe him better than by telling you he was a good man to me and the little one. He left me twenty-five cents, and I had enough coal for the day and some milk

for the baby. When he didn't come home that night I was terribly worried,—especially as Henty had cut his wife's throat and then killed himself, and the street so full of people. I walked the floor the whole night, sir, and when morning came I thought maybe John had got a little work out of town somewhere and would be back soon. You know, sir, things look brighter in the morning when you've been worrying all night."

"Yes, yes," answered Sergeant Reynolds, impatiently; "but what did your husband look like?"

"He looked like a ghost, sir, when he went away. His face was so drawn-like and white, and he kissed the baby so many times you'd thought he never meant to see it again. And then when he didn't come home that night I was fearful worried. The next morning I got five cents' worth of milk for the baby and five cents' worth of crackers for myself. And then I had to buy five cents' worth of kindling wood, you know, to warm baby's milk, sir. That only left me ten cents, and I thought if John didn't come home last night I

wouldn't know what to do. And all day long I waited for him,—and when night came I thought I'd go crazy, sir. And then I simply got beside myself. I thought John had left me for good and all,—I don't know what made me think it,—but I did think it, sir. So I took the baby in my arms and went to a drug store for some laudanum with the last ten cents I had in the world. The man wouldn't give it to me, so I went to another drug store and got some rat poison. Then I went home. The baby was asleep then, so I put the poison on the table and waited for the child to wake up; for I didn't dare to disturb its sleep, sir, and that the last one it should have on earth."

"You didn't mean to kill the baby?"

"Ah, yes, sir. God pity me. With John away, perhaps for good and all, and no money, and nothing to look forward to, and the dead people next door, —ah, sir, I was ready to die and take the child with me. I couldn't leave it —as John did me."

The big station house clock laboriously ticked out the seconds. The woman's head was bent over the baby, she crying

silently the while. The police sergeant aimlessly traced unmeaning figures on a piece of paper in front of him.

"Then what did you do?" he asked.

"I wrapped the child in a shawl and put it on the sofa. I went to the window and looked out, and the street looked quiet and restful like. And so I thought I'd walk up and down the block and get a breath of God's air for the last time, sir. When I got into the street there was a man and woman quarrelling a few steps from me. He had the drink in him and she was a-pleading with him about something. And then one of the Henty children came up the street with a pitcher of beer for the folks in his house,—and the father and mother lying there with their throats cut.

"Oh, sir, I felt that down-spirited I couldn't breathe, or pray to God, or think of anything but John and the baby. For everybody seemed to be doing wrong, or thinking wrong, and there didn't seem to be good anywhere, or any use of living. But I didn't want to wake the baby, so I kept walking up and down, up and down, and trying to pray, until it got to be nearly midnight.

And then a lot of drunken louts made game of me. I jumped at one of them and scratched him, and ran for dear life into the house, forgetful of the noise I'd make to wake the baby. I did wake him, sir. So I took him on my knee after I had got a spoon and dipped it into the poison paste. I wasn't afraid for myself,—not a bit of it, sir,—but I did feel sorry for the little one. And just as soon as I was ready to put the spoon into his mouth he turned his little face to me and laughed and clapped his hands. And that saved his life, sir, —and mine! I just dropped the spoon all of a-tremble and caught the baby in my arms and cried fit as if my heart would break. For he was such a little thing, sir, and so trustful-like and innocent, and would have taken the poison from me as if it were good, healthy food to make him big and strong like John was before he lost his place.

"But I was afraid to stay in the house there with the poison, and I didn't want to throw it away, sir, because I thought maybe the drug clerk would give me my money back in the morning if I told him I hadn't used any of the poison.

And so I wrapped the baby up and walked it up and down the square until morning came. Then I went back to the house; for things look different in the morning, sir, and I thought maybe John might come back again."

"Had anything to eat to-day?" asked Sergeant Reynolds, trying to speak his gruffest.

"All I wanted, sir,—three crackers. You see, I bribed one of the Henty children. I gave Billy Henty six crackers for a cup of milk for the baby. The druggist wouldn't take back the poison, so I brought it home again, and as soon as it got dark I had to take the baby out; for I'm afraid, sir, to stay in the house with the poison,—I'm afraid of myself, sir,—for John might come back, mightn't he?"

Sergeant Reynolds drummed nervously on the table, and coughed once or twice to clear his throat before answering.

"You see," went on the woman, "I haven't any money, and I thought perhaps, if you couldn't find John for a couple of days, you might give me a little milk for the baby, and I'll scrub

the floors to pay for it. Will you, please, sir?"

"Ting-a-ling-ling" went the telephone bell. The sergeant jumped to his feet and walked briskly to the telephone.

"Hello. Yes, this is Sergeant Reynolds. Harbor Police? That you, Dan? Yes,—unknown man—striped shirt—gray trousers—tan shoes—blue tie—no collar. Been in the water how long? What's that? Yes—yes—all right. So long, old man."

And Sergeant Reynolds hung up the receiver and turned to find at his elbow the little woman with the baby. Her face was ghastly.

"That was John's description," she whispered; "have they found him?"

The sergeant gasped. For an instant he did not know what to say. Then, very quickly, he said, "This man had a long blond beard,—John had a black moustache, didn't he?"

"Yes, yes, and dark hair like the baby's," she answered, breathlessly. "But how did you know John?"

"Oh," answered the sergeant, easily enough, "I've often seen him hunting

for work around here. You didn't think he'd kill himself, did you?" he added, trying to speak lightly.

"No," she answered, sinking into her chair; "no," and she shook her head mechanically two or three times. "You see," she said, after a little space, "if I knew John was dead, then the baby and I wouldn't stay on earth a single second longer. No, John would not kill himself," she repeated.

The sergeant pressed an electric button near his desk, and in a few seconds the station house matron came in.

"Mrs. Martin," he said, "I wish you'd take charge of this little woman and her baby to-night. Let them sleep in your room, and see that they both have something to eat as soon as you can get it. In the morning we'll phone to Dr. Bush, of the Board of Charities. And—er—er—one moment, Mrs. Martin, will you step over here for a second?"

The matron followed him over to the corner of the room, and he whispered to her for almost ten minutes. "She need never know it, you know," he said in conclusion. "The man was despondent and killed himself,—that's all there's to it.

I've lied to her; but as you're a woman you'll know how to fix it all right. Do you think it wise to let her know?"

Mrs. Martin pursed her lips and wrinkled her brows. "It's an every-day case," she answered, practically, "but we'll see."

Mrs. Martin walked over to the little woman and said, kindly, "Now, if you'll come with me, I think we can fix you comfortably. I'll take the baby,—there! Why, what a fat little baby he is, to be sure!"

The mother's eyes kindled with pleasure. "He's an awfully good baby," she said, very seriously, "and he looks the born image of John."

The matron led the way to the door and opened it. The mother stopped on the threshold and looked back at Sergeant Reynolds. "I thank you very much, sir, for the trouble you've taken, but I'd like to ask one more favor. Can I, sir?"

"Well?" queried the sergeant.

"Why, if your men find John before morning, will you come and wake me, sir?"

The sergeant looked up at the clock thoughtfully. "I don't think they'll

find him to-night." Then as a thought struck him,—

"Do you, Mrs. Martin?"

Mrs. Martin looked at the sergeant, at the mother, and then at the baby. "I hardly think," she said, slowly, letting her eyes meet the sergeant's meaningly for a moment,—"I hardly think they'll find him for a little time yet."

"But they will find him, some time?" asked the little wife, anxiously.

"Oh, yes," reassuringly spoke the matron, "they'll find him. But you have the baby until then, you know."

"Yes," and the little mother peered into the matron's arms, where the baby lay. "Yes, I have the baby,—and he looks like John."

And then the baby opened its little blue eyes and looked wonderingly around. "Pa-pa," it said, weakly,—"pa-pa."

"I taught him that," gleefully shouted the mother, bending over to kiss the mite; "that's all he knows, too,—the only words he can speak. I'm going to teach him to say 'mamma' next, but I wanted him to say 'papa' first,—just to please John. Say 'pa-pa,' baby, say 'pa-pa.'"

The little fists doubled up and the mouth worked convulsively.

"Pa-pa—pa-pa," gurgled the baby.

Something hard came to the matron's throat, something moist to her eyes. "Come to bed, dearie," she said, kindly, to the mother, linking her arm into that of John's wife,—"come to bed, dearie, and get a good night's rest."

But the mother did not sleep that night. She knew the future and its grind. The baby slept. And John, too, for that matter, the sleep of cowardice—the sleep eternal. It was an easy solution for him,—and after all, it was only an every-day case.

BOB BATES'S WEDDING

A COUPLE of months after Brooke had told his intimates that he had forsworn Bohemia, Bob Bates and Kate Rhodes were united in the holy bonds of matrimony. None of the Bohemians were in town on the happy wedding-day save Brooke and Jean Travers. Jean was maid of honor and Brooke was best man, and the four people had crowded into a coupé that was meant to accommodate but two, and the groom sat on the best man's lap, while the bride crushed the crash skirt of the maid of honor and complained of her sharp knees. For by this cramped economy Bates saved a dollar, and dollars were scarce that eventful August day.

In fact, for six weeks Bates had practised the most rigorous economy so his marriage could be an assured fact on the tenth day of August. On two separate occasions he refused to pay the instalments due on his bicycle, and commenced to raise a beard on the first

day of July merely to save himself the monetary annoyance of being shaved.

"Why are you wearing a beard in summer-time?" asked Brooke of him one day.

"Like Samson," he answered, "it gives me more strength,—financially," he added. "I am leaning against the pillars of Economy, and can by the strength of my unshaven abstinence pull down about my ears a Philistine temple shaped like a dime savings-bank. I've two dollars and ten cents in it now, Ben, and yet my beard isn't even goat-like in shape."

"It certainly needs trimming — or something," said Brooke, critically.

"I think it needs something more than the trimming," answered Bates, thoughtfully, stroking the topic in question. "It has an air of need all over it. It looks moth-eaten on one side, don't you think?"

"Both sides," said Brooke, positively.

But Bates had the beard shaved off on the day that preceded the wedding, and Kate was given the contents of the dime savings-bank, and with this she purchased the shirt-waist in which she was married.

A friend of Bates, a tailor, gave him as a wedding present the loan of a black suit, the stipulation being that Bates should return the suit the same day he was married. "Episcopal service, I presume?" said his tailor friend.

"Whichever's the cheapest," answered Bates. "But why do you ask?"

"Never having been married before," said the tailor, loftily, "you may not know that at the conclusion of the Episcopal service you go on your knees to receive the blessing from the minister. Under the circumstances please pull the trousers up a trifle so they won't bag at the knees."

"I'll do more than that," said Bates, generously; "I'll only go down on one knee."

While the four of them were in the coupé on the way to the minister's, Bates suddenly uttered a cry, and, putting his hand to his pocket, hauled forth a quantity of letters. "Ah, here it is!" he said, with a sigh of relief. "I thought I'd forgotten the minister's money."

"How much are you going to give him?" asked Brooke.

"Five dollars. I only wanted to give

him three, but Kate said five,—so he gets five."

"I should think," said practical Jean Travers, "that as you give it to him in a sealed envelope, he'd not know until you were gone whether it was three dollars or five. I'd give him three, Kate."

"No," said Kate, positively. "Bob must give five dollars,—it's more respectable. A three-dollar marriage seems too cheap to be lasting. I'd rather pay five, because it's an expense we won't incur more than two or three times in a lifetime,—and then, too, you get a first-class article at that price."

And so Kate Rhodes became Mrs. Robert Bates in a genteel, highly respectable way. It only took the minister five minutes to make five dollars, which fact set Bates mentally computing how long at that ratio it would take to become a millionaire, and then made him sorry he'd taken up newspaper work instead of entering the ministry.

And that set his reportorial, inquisitive wits to work, and within a few minutes after he was married he asked the minister which yielded him the most money, a marriage, a birth, or a burial.

"Well," said the divine, with a smile, "people seem to be happier and more generous at a marriage than at any other time."

And then Bates was glad he'd given five dollars instead of three.

But Jean Travers said, "The dead can afford to be generous, too." And the minister looked at her in an odd, wondering way. But Jean's face was impassive.

Then when the reverend had left the parlor to go up-stairs and sign the marriage certificate, Bates took off his white tie and substituted a blue dotted one. "The white tie has too bridegroomy a look to it," he explained.

When they had come from the minister's, Brooke, who was leading the way with Bates's grip, called back to the groom, "Bob, your coupé has disappeared."

"Oh, that's all right," rejoined Bates. "He said he'd only take me as far as the minister's for a dollar."

"Well, he's gone and you're in a dollar," laughed Brooke.

"No, I'm not; I paid in advance."

"Did what?" said Brooke, not believing his ears.

"I paid in advance."

Brooke shrugged his shoulders. "Whatever put such a novel idea into your head, Bob?"

Bates looked shamefaced. "I don't know why I did it, Ben. Guess it was mental excitement consequent to being married. But," he added, "I don't mean to make it a habit."

"Don't," said Brooke; "for once you get in the habit of paying in advance it doesn't take you long to establish a good credit; once you get credit you're apt to get more than you need, and so run into debt. Therefore, to sum up, the surest way to get into debt is to pay in advance. Am I not right?"

"You're not only logical, Ben, you're comforting," said Bates; "hereafter I pay for nothing until I've used it."

And when the four of them took a car that ran down-town, Brooke paid the car fare.

"Ben," whispered Jean Travers to him, "to be perfectly logical, dear, you shouldn't have paid the conductor until you were leaving the car."

"My dear, there are exceptions to all

rules, especially the rules that we ourselves make."

Kate was in the seventh heaven. She knew that every person in the car was looking at her, and she felt that they also knew that she was a bride. For everything she had on was spick-and-span new,—and newest and loveliest of all was the plain gold circlet on the third finger of the left hand. It was wonderful how often she found occasion to push back a truant curl over her left ear. In fact, she developed a chronic case of hair-muss on the left side before the car brought them to their destination.

When they had reached Bates's whilom bachelor quarters, Bates excused himself,—said he'd return in ten minutes. And within the prescribed time he returned with eight sandwiches, ten cents' worth of pears, and a huckleberry pie. Brooke, meantime, had made the coffee on Bates's gas stove,—an article of Bates's furniture, by the bye, of which his watchful landlady was not apprised.

"And now for the wedding breakfast," shouted Bates. "Eat, drink, and be merry."

And to the choral accompaniment of the coffee-pot, that sang so loud and so merrily it almost bubbled over with joy, the bride and groom, the maid of honor and the best man, all sat down to the feast.

Kate was radiant. "Oh," said she, "I'm so choked up with happiness I don't feel I have room for this other sandwich."

"I hope the good things of life come crowding on you so fast that you can't possibly dodge them, dear," said Jean Travers.

"Well, the very first thing I'm going to do," said the bride, "is to get Bob out of debt and to keep him out."

"Do that, my darling," said the groom, "and I'll owe you more than I ever did to all my creditors lumped together."

"Cut the wedding-cake, Kate," said Brooke, passing her a knife.

Kate dexterously quartered the huckleberry pie, and passing Jean a piece, said, solemnly, "Put this under your pillow to-night, Jean, and you'll dream of your future husband."

"Yes, and I can see my landlady's face when she looks at the pillow next morning."

"I'm sorry the crowd isn't here," said Bates; "yet it's more economical to have a few. One more person would have made another pie a necessity."

"Well, here's a toast," said Brooke. "Everybody got coffee? Well, our old toast to the crowd,—our old, hearty, Bohemian, careless toast,—

Here's to our crowd—and the world we inhabit;
We enter it naked and bare;
We die, and we go—no one knows where;
We've been thoroughbreds here,
We'll be thoroughbreds there."

They drank the toast in silence, and then came a knock on the door.

"See who it is, Ben," said Bates.

Brooke went to the door, held a whispered conversation, and then came back: "A Mr. Husted wants to see you."

"Pshaw!" said Bates,—"he's a creditor. I owe him three dollars and twenty-five cents."

There was an awkward silence for a space. Then the bride said, "Why not pay him, dear? It will be a good start for the honeymoon."

"Why, dearie, I've just got about enough money to pay our board up in

the country for a week." Bates was visibly distressed. "But," he added, "if you prefer it, Kate, dearest, I'll pay it."

Benny Brooke broke in at this juncture: "I'll go down and see Mr. Husted and tell him to come back in three weeks." And he darted out of the door.

In a second he reappeared. "Jean," he called, "may I see you for a moment?"

When she had come into the hall Brooke said, "How much have you with you?"

"Eighty-two cents; do you want it?"

"Give me sixty of it," he said; "I can make up the difference."

And Brooke went down-stairs and got a receipt from Mr. Husted.

When he got back to the room Jean was clearing the table, Kate was putting on her hat, and Bates was brushing his coat. "We've got seventeen minutes to catch the train, Ben," said Kate; "will you please tie my parasol and Bob's cane together? There's a piece of twine on the bureau."

They managed to get the train, and had thirty seconds to spare. Bates

kissed Jean and Kate indiscriminately, and Brooke, not to be outdone in gallantry, followed the groom's example. Then the happy man whispered something in Jean's ear, then darted to Brooke and whispered something to him. After which everybody kissed all over again, the whistle blew, and the bride and groom jumped aboard the train.

"God bless you and good luck!" shouted Brooke.

Bates waved his hat from the car window, his bride fluttered her handkerchief, and the train puffed out of the station.

"What did Bob whisper to you?" asked Brooke of Jean, as they were walking down the street.

"He said he was going to buy Kate a new pair of shoes with the first money he could borrow. What did he tell you?"

"He told me he had found a way out of his financial difficulties; he's going to pay his creditors on the second Tuesday of each week."

RANDOLPH'S PICTURE

"COME in," called Brooke in answer to the knock at his door.

The landlady pushed her portly form into the room and handed Brooke a note. "There's a little boy down-stairs waiting for an answer," she said.

Brooke noted the handwriting, knit his brows in a puzzled way when he found he could not recognize the feminine chirography, and then tore open the envelope.

"DEAR MR. BROOKE:

Mr. William Randolph, who has been ill at my house for the past nine weeks, is now dying and asks me to send you word. He would like to see you at once.

MRS. J. H. CRAMER."

Brooke stared straight ahead of him. Billy Randolph dying!—Billy Randolph whom no one had heard of for the past three years,—who had disappeared as if the ground had swallowed him up,—Billy Randolph who drank like a fish and whose heart was as big as all out doors,—Billy Randolph dying! Brooke thought of the——

"Any answer?" asked the landlady.

Brooke roused himself in an instant. "Tell him I'll be right down," he said.

Two minutes later he and the boy, a lad of ten years, were walking briskly up the street.

"We live only about five minutes' walk from here," said the boy.

Brooke vouchsafed no reply. He was thinking of the man who had come back to die,—of the man who, in his own impetuous way, had sneered at public opinion, drank himself into the gutter and then disappeared. Brooke knew the proud, unbending spirit of the man, and felt that the end was near else he (Brooke) would never have been sent for.

"What's the matter with Mr. Randolph?" he asked the boy.

"Consumption, sir. We were afraid he was going to die last night. He bled from the mouth terribly. This morning he asked mother to send for you."

"Has any one called on him since he's been sick?" asked Brooke.

"No, sir. But he must think he has company, for I often hear him talking. I peeped through the key-hole yesterday and saw he was talking to a picture.

When I came in he put it under his pillow."

They had reached the house by now. A motherly old lady who had been watching at the window came quickly to the door.

"This is Mr. Brooke, I believe? Yes? Well, Mr. Randolph doesn't know how sick he really is. The doctor left an hour ago and says Mr. Randolph cannot possibly last the day out. Frank, dear, show Mr. Brooke up-stairs."

The boy tiptoed up to the second flight of stairs and then pointed to a door at the other end of the hall. "That's his room," he whispered. Brooke walked softly to the door and knocked gently.

He waited a long time for an answer. Then he knocked again,—louder this time. Again he waited for an answer, and none coming he pushed open the door and walked into the room.

He had nerved himself,—he had been prepared to note a great change in Randolph,—but the waxen, thin, puny face that looked at him with unusually brilliant eyes all but unmanned him.

"Hullo, Brooke, old fellow. I told you twice to come in. Not growing

diffident, are you, in regard to visiting a bachelor's apartment?"

It was a flash of the old Randolph, and as Brooke came quickly forward and grasped the emaciated hand in his he found voice to say, "Why, Billy, I thought to find you a sicker man than you are."

Randolph shook his head quietly and smiled. "They say, Brooke, old man, that consumptives never know when they're going to die. There's always an unusual brightness and a lightness of spirit that comes just before the end and fools the poor consumptive into the notion that he's getting better. It's like the brilliant spurt the flame of a candle makes before it splutters its last and then goes out. Well, I'm feeling stronger to-day than I've felt in six weeks, so I know I'm going to die to-day." And again he smiled.

"I guess you're worth a great many dead men yet," answered Brooke, trying to speak lightly. "Where have you been, Billy, these past three years?"

"Trying to turn the subject, are you, Benny? Well, my picture and I have travelled all over the world,—getting

drunk in every country under the sun, having twinges of conscience from sunny Spain way up to bleak Siberia, carrying remorse and the seeds of consumption from night-clad Norway down to blue-skyed Italy. I was too proud to give my enemies in this town a chance to say, 'I told you so.' So I went away, —all over this blessed, happy world I went, and made a distinct and separate failure in each and every one of them. I didn't want to show any favoritism, Ben, so I got drunk in each country I visited. But I'm sorry I took the picture with me."

"No one ever understood why you left your lodgings that day, Billy, and didn't take so much as an extra necktie. Nothing but a picture of yourself, the landlady said. The boys said it was a new phase of your character,—that you weren't egotistical. It was a puzzle to all of us, Billy, but I knew you must have had a good reason for doing it. What was it?"

Randolph turned and looked at Brooke, looked at him in a troubled way, and raised himself slowly on his elbow. To Brooke the sick man's eyes took on a

seriousness and an intensity he had never noted in them before. There was something unnatural in their calm,—something uncanny in their fixedness.

"I'm going to tell you something strange, Ben; something no human being has ever known from my lips. It's the story of my picture and what it has done." He paused and took a long, deep breath before he began again. "Years ago, when I was at college, I had my picture taken. I was nineteen then,—I'm twenty-nine now. When I left college I tossed the picture into an old trunk, together with my cap and gown, my books, and all my college treasures. And there they lay for years, until father died and the house was sold and I came into my money and moved to Mrs. Bleeker's and started to drink. And then one day Harry Porter, who was then a Freshman, wrote me a note and asked me if I could loan him my cap and gown because he hadn't bought his yet, and his class was to be photographed the next day. I got home that night a little more drunk than usual, but I recollected Porter's letter and went to the old trunk to get the cap and gown.

"I brought them over to my bedroom, and just as I had crossed the threshold my picture dropped out from the folds of the gown. I picked it up, Ben, carried it over to my desk and looked at it. And it shamed me. It was beautiful. And I, drunken brute that I was, felt the hot blood rush into my face,—felt disgraced, dishonored, before my own picture.

"You have felt, Brooke,—we all have once or twice in our lives,—a moment when the world was at our feet,—when we were millions and millions of miles above it,—when we could do anything —brave anything! It's a bit of God that gets into one's soul then, and it comes on one's face and glorifies it. It's gone in an instant It's too big—too near to that which God is for any of us mortals to hold it for long. What the thought was that passed through my brain when I sat for my picture,—what grand, noble, boyishly enthusiastic, masterful thought had flitted through my head in that second of time I don't know. But at that precise, absolute second the photographer had snapped the picture. He'd caught and perpetu-

ated an expression that was Godlike. It wasn't me—and it was. It stood as a proof of the immortality of a man's soul, no matter how degraded and fallen his body might be. And there I sat, Ben, looking into the face of the man I once was, and wishing God would strike me dead for being the drunken brute into which I had sunk myself." Two big tears ran slowly down his cheeks and splashed on Brooke's hand.

Benny Brooke leaned over and put his arms around the sick man's neck. "Fall back on your pillow, Billy, and rest awhile," he said, gently. There were times when Benny Brooke had the intuition of a woman.

Prone on his back lay the sick man, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. He coughed weakly once or twice before he went on.

"I tried to live up to that picture, Ben,—I kept it on my desk, and for three weeks I went to it every night and told it that I had not tasted a drop that day,—nor would not the next day—nor the day after that. And I reasoned that maybe that Godlike look on the face was the good in me, and that it was try-

ing to save,—that the old, boyish self was fighting with the manhood that wasn't manhood, but only weakness. For three whole weeks, Ben, I kept my word to my picture and then came that awful night at Lowry's. Remember?"

"Yes, yes; I remember," answered Brooke, quietly. "Try to forget such things, Billy."

"Oh, I can't; I'll never forget that night. It wasn't what happened at Lowry's,—it was afterwards. I recollected how drunk I was, and how you kept the crowd from me, and told the police that you'd be responsible for my conduct. I can recollect you getting a cab and taking me to my rooms; but I wouldn't let you come in. You thought it was drunken obstinacy; but I was sober then. The thought of my picture sobered me. I didn't want you to see it."

He put his thin, wasted hands to his face, and the tears trickled through the white, bloodless fingers, and his body shook with the sobs that he could not master.

In a little while he grew calm again. "I couldn't look at the picture at first. I

turned my back to it, Ben, and tried to imagine how it looked, for I needed its helpfulness. But my brain refused to conjure up the image, so I turned quickly and looked at the picture. And then, oh, God! Ben, such a sight met my eyes that might have killed me. There was a sneer on the face,—a pitiless, merciless, horrible, disgusting sneer. It said as plainly as if it had spoken the words, 'I'm finished with you.' And that is why I left the house again that night when I told you I wouldn't,—and I got drunk again, and stayed drunk for four days. The picture had given me up—and I didn't care."

"You shouldn't leave your imagination carry you away like that, Billy," said Brooke, slowly. "You, a man of breeding and education, should have known that to your drunken brain the picture *appeared* to sneer at you. In your sober sense the absurdity of such a thing would be apparent at once."

"Brooke," said Randolph, solemnly, "the sneer has never left that picture from that day to this. When I got back to my rooms again I went up to the picture, and there was that mocking,

taunting expression on it. I opened the window in a frenzy and threw that horrible picture into the street. Ten minutes later Mrs. Bleeker brought it up to me,—her domestic had been washing the step, saw the picture fall and brought it into the house. I took it as Fate then. The next day I said to that picture, 'We'll travel together, you and I. We'll go a globe-trotting; and you sneer at me and I'll sneer at the world, and between us we'll show this whirling old mud-ball and all the inhabitants thereof that we don't give a rap for it or its thoughts.'

"And so I went away, Ben, taking nothing with me but the picture. I left it once at a hotel in Switzerland,—never missed it until I was going to bed that night in a little German village. I telegraphed for it at once, and before the next evening it was with me again,—the sneer worse than ever. I celebrated the occasion by getting drunk,—threw a glass of whiskey in its face, so it, too, could taste that which had dragged me down. And when I found that I had consumption I thought I'd come home to die. I found this place, because I wanted to send for

you at the end. And one more thing,—whom do you think I have as a physician? Little Harry Porter,—the boy to whom I loaned my cap and gown the day his class was photographed. Little world, isn't it?"

Benny Brooke heaved a deep sigh: "Where's the picture now, Billy?"

"Under my pillow. Ben, it seems as if the sneer isn't as deep as it was,—as if it's fading away,—as if the face were growing more charitable. Maybe it's because it knows I'm dying, and all things—even men and women—grow charitable toward the dying. It may be that it knows I haven't drank any liquor for nine weeks,—possibly because I couldn't. But the sneer's going,—it may be I'm living up to the picture now that I'm dying,—which is a sort of a contradiction, isn't it, Ben?"

But Benny Brooke made no answer. He was thinking of the man in the early flush of his manhood, of the honors that were his, of his big, physical prowess, of the heartiness of his laugh, of his loyalty to his friends, of his love for the woman who——

Then Benny Brooke knit his brows

deeper. Billy Randolph hadn't mentioned her throughout his entire story,—no, not a suggestion of her. People had said that he never drank a drop until she threw him over, and she had said she jilted him because he refused to tell her something she wanted to know, and he said he was in honor bound not to tell her. But he had never told his side of the story, and men who knew him best knew he never would. But people said she started him drinking, though he denied that, and said he had a natural craving for liquor, which was a lie. And yet it was a boast of his that he never knowingly told a man or woman a falsehood.

But that woman,—why hadn't he mentioned her name? thought Brooke. He hadn't forgotten her,—Brooke knew too well for that. Yet why had——

Brooke pulled himself together with a start. The little clock on the bureau was ticking unusually loud,—it seemed he'd never heard a clock tick so loudly before. Then he could hear his heart thumping against his ribs. There seemed to be a strange stillness,—an emptiness,—as if something that had been in the room

had gone out of it. He looked toward Randolph, a deadly fear in his heart. And then he understood the stillness and the calm serenity of the room. The sick man was dead.

For a long time Benny Brooke sat quietly beside the dead man and made no sound nor moved a muscle. Then he rose and folded the wasted hands across the dead man's chest. Then, quietly, softly, fearfully, as if he were committing a crime, he reached under the pillow and felt around for the picture.

His hand trembled when he held the picture up close to his face. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them quickly to get the full effect of the pict ure. Its beauty dazzled him. High resolve, unending endeavor, tremendous force, were there. It was as Randolph had said, as if the photographer had caught a glimpse of soul. There was no sneer; it was a fearless, uncompromising, masterful, Godlike face. And as Brooke looked from the picture to the face of the dead, he thought he saw the resemblance stronger than ever he saw it before; as if the fleeting, Godlike expression of the picture had been photo-

graphed for all time on the face of the dead man.

And as Brooke turned the picture over thoughtfully he saw something that startled him,—a picture of a woman,—the woman his friend had loved, cunningly pasted on the back of Randolph's picture. And on her beautiful face was a sneer, an ugly, taunting sneer, artificially made with a lead-pencil.

And Benny Brooke tremblingly laid the picture in the stiffened fingers of the dead man, and then weakly sank on his knees beside the bed and burst into tears.

For Benny Brooke understood now!

MONTEITH'S ROMANCE

THE rupture between Fanny Locke and Monteith was a nine days' wonder in Bohemia. Monteith, on his side, said nothing, and Fanny went hurriedly to New York,—but where in New York nobody knew. Nor was it for two years that the truth leaked out, and by that time Fanny was Mrs. John Redpath.

Monteith told it to Brooke one evening when both of them were in a retrospective mood. Brooke had been sighing like a furnace because he had come across a little box of matches with "April 10" scrawled across it in blue pencil, and Monteith had looked into Brooke's eyes. There was no twinkle in them now, and Monteith's face grew serious, too. For he understood Benny Brooke.

"Memories, Ben?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Brooke slowly; "the worst sort, Monty: the sadly-sweet,—they hurt the most."

"I wonder, Ben, why the past always

does seem so much sweeter than the present,—why certain days and nights stand out from the past so vividly, and one can say to one's self, 'There was a time when I was perfectly, absolutely happy'?"

"Because," sighed Brooke, "time softens all things; even the days of sorrow take a sweeter aspect when we look back to them,—all the sting is gone. And if sorrow is softened, how much more is happiness enhanced when we look back to it!"

"But doesn't it seem unfair, Ben, that we don't know how happy we are until it's past and gone? Doesn't it seem that we've been cheated in some way because at that time we don't appreciate the sweetness of it all,—that we've got to wait years until we really see the glorious happiness of those days?"

"Yes, it does look as if we'd been cheated," answered Brooke, and he sighed again. "But," he added, philosophically, "no one can take from us the fact of those happy days happening,—no one can dim the dear memory of them."

"Yes, that's true," slowly answered Monteith.

For a little space neither spoke. Then Monteith said, "And the story of that match-box, Ben?"

Brooke's lips parted and his breath came quickly. "Why," he began, then he brought his teeth together hard, pursed his lips, and drew a long, deep breath. "I'd rather not, Monty," he said.

Monteith nodded his head and looked down at the floor. "Brooke," he began, "it's two years to-night since Fanny left town, and I came around here expressly to tell you why. It was all a horrible mistake; we were the victims of a prankish trick of fate. And yet," he added, "it was all for the best, I presume. Fanny is happy, has a dainty home and a husband who idolizes her,—as he should, too, by Jove!"

Brooke was silent. His mind went back to those Bohemian days when Fanny Locke and Monteith were part of a happy, careless crowd; when Monteith's every thought was for the girl; when it was a matter of laughing comment to the crowd that Fanny couldn't make a drawing of a man, no matter of what nationality, or be he hero or vil-

lain, but what Monty's features were reproduced. And yet she had gone away in the night, and no one knew why. The thought of it made Brooke clutch his match-box still tighter, and he looked over at Monteith curiously.

"Fanny," went on Monteith, "was, as all artists are, romantic to a degree. She loved flowers, violets especially. Maybe she loved violets most because the first thing I ever gave her was a bunch of them. That might be the reason and it mightn't. But I know she loved them. One day I said to her, 'Fanny, I'm jealous of violets because you love them so much. If you didn't care for them the affection those flowers get would all come my way, and then you'd care for me about three times more than you do.' 'That couldn't be,' she said, seriously. 'I couldn't care for you, Lew, more than I do now. But,' she added, after a second's thought, 'I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll begin to hate them; I know how, too. Let's make this compact: When you get tired of me or I get tired of you (which God grant may never happen) don't either of us tell it to the other. Instead, send or

give a bunch of violets. That means all is over. From this time on, my dear, don't send or give me one tiny violet. I hate them now with all my heart, because they mean the shrivelling of my heart if I get them from you.'

"Well, that was our compact, Ben, and it ended my giving her violets." Monteith stopped suddenly.

"I see it all now," said Brooke, slowly.

"Yes, I thought you would, Ben. Just think of it, old man," he went on passionately. "Just think of it,—what children of Fate we were. And all through the mistaken kindness of Fales and Drummond."

"You haven't told them?"

"No, not yet. You can, though. For two years I've not opened my mouth about it to a living soul. And it all happened so naturally, too,—seemed as if it was ordained to happen. The old flower woman was crossing the street, Drummond rang his bell, but Fales's wheel hit the old lady, and flower woman, Drummond, and Jack Fales were tumbled in one big heap. Luckily, the old soul was more scared than hurt, but Fales in the goodness of his heart

insisted on buying out her entire stock, twenty-two bunches of violets.

"'Fanny Locke lives right around the corner,' said Drummond, as an inspiration struck him, 'let's send the flowers to her with Monty's compliments.'

"The old lady made one big bunch of violets from the twenty-two small ones, and then Drummond said, 'Go right around the corner here, number 264, and tell the lady who opens the door that they're for Miss Locke with Mr. Monteith's compliments.'

"The old lady took them around, and the next morning Fanny packed bag and baggage and went to New York. Where in New York she went none of us knew, and not a word to any of us, not a tiny line to me."

Monteith covered his face with his hands and sat a long, long time. Several times Brooke essayed to speak, but thought better of it. At last he found voice. "You've seen her, Monty?" he asked.

Monteith straightened up and looked ahead of him with dry eyes. "Yes, once," and he sighed deeply. "After Fales and Drummond had told me of

the violets I went over to New York, and in a quiet way tried to find her,—asked at the newspaper offices, etc., if a Miss Locke had presented herself with pen-and-ink sketches. But it was no use. Then at last another idea struck me. I inserted a personal twice a week for over a year in one of the New York papers. All I said was,—

FANNY,—I did not send the violets.
MONTY.

"About a year after I first inserted the personal an answer appeared. It was printed directly under my personal, and said,—

WHO did?
FANNY.

"I almost went crazy with delight, Ben, when I saw that answer. I sent word to take out my personal and to insert this one in its place:

FANNY,—Where can I see you to explain?
MONTY.

"A week passed, but I heard nothing. Another week, then I again inserted

the personal. But a month passed—two months, and I ordered in the personal then every day. At last I was rewarded. Again, directly under my query, appeared an answer:

WILL see you 65th Street entrance Central Park, 4 o'clock, Monday next.

FANNY.

"I don't know how I lived from the Thursday the personal appeared until the Monday I was to see her. I don't think I slept a half-hour a night. I couldn't eat—I couldn't stand still—I could do nothing—absolutely nothing.

"I got to Central Park at two o'clock and waited. Up and down I paced, up and down, up and down, until I ached. Fifty times I pulled out my watch. At four o'clock I was almost distracted; at 4.15 I was nearly crazy. And then right at my elbow I heard a voice,—Fanny's voice,—'How are you, Lew?' she said, quietly.

"I turned like a flash, Ben, and my heart stood still. Face to face once more we stood, and I stretched out my arms to her,—ready for her to throw herself into them again,—ready to press

her once more to my heart that had been hungering for her so long.

"She drew back quickly, her face scarlet. 'You mustn't do that, Lew,' she said, hurriedly; 'I'm married now. There's been some horrible mistake, I know, but I'm married now, and neither of us must forget that. Let's find a bench quickly; I can't stay long.'

"Mechanically, Ben, I led the way to a bench close at hand. I felt crushed, stunned. It was for this I had striven and waited. I had found her—and she was married.

"I told her the story of the big bunch of violets,—told her how Fales and Drummond had done what they did out of the goodness of their hearts,—thinking they were pleasing her and doing me a courtesy. And when the truth dawned on her her lips quivered, and two big tears ran slowly down her cheeks.

"We sat there silent for a long time, each of us living over the past, thinking of the days that were all happiness,—thinking of those dear dead days and the joy of them.

"And then she told her story. The day after she arrived in New York she

was taken sick,—brain fever. She went to a hospital,—met him there,—he was a doctor. After every one had given her up he clung to the belief that he could save her, and he did. And through days and nights of careful, tireless nursing he brought her through the shadow. They married,—she was happy.

"'But why,' I asked, 'when you did answer my personal, did you let so long a time elapse before you made this meeting?'

"'I did not think it right, Lew, for me to meet you again, for I was married. And day after day I saw your appeal, and then I argued I will meet him just once and find out the truth. And then weeks passed before I summoned courage to let you hear from me. And at last I put in the personal you saw last Thursday. All day to-day I have been wishing you would not come; in fact, I started for the door and went back three times before I really went out. For I'm married, and being married I owe to myself and my husband all the respect that is in me. I had no right to see you to-day, and yet, yet, yet——' she choked and was dumb.

"I don't know why, Ben, but always in the great events of our lives you'll find little things—foolish things—take possession of one's mind. And all the time she was talking I was watching a sparrow a few feet distant trying to drag a tangled bit of twine from a twig and was wondering if he'd succeed or not.

"Then Fanny spoke again, but her voice was even now,—cold, I thought: 'You said, Lew, that when either of us grew tired one of us was to send the other violets, didn't you?'

"'Yes,' I answered; 'but I didn't send them to you.'

"'But you said,' she persisted, 'that when either of us sent or gave the other violets everything was over, didn't you?'

"'Yes, Fanny, but——'

"She rose to her feet, interrupting me with a wave of her hand. Quickly she undid a flat brown bit of paper she was carrying, and there was a big bunch of pressed violets.

"'All is over between us, Lew,' she said, her voice all a-tremble, 'so I give you a bunch of violets. They're the same ones. I've kept them, I don't know why.' Like a flash she bent over

them and kissed them once, twice, three times passionately, her eyes tear-blinded. Then she thrust the withered bunch into my hands, and without so much as a good-by she turned and walked rapidly away.

"I sprang to my feet and called after her, 'Fanny, Fanny,—one tiny second only.' But she walked all the faster; never turned her head that she held high in air. And then, Ben, a great overpowering weakness seized me, and I sank on the bench and cried like a child."

The clock on Brooke's mantel ticked loudly and there was a mist in front of Ben Brooke's eyes that made all things seem blurred. For the woman had done what was right,—and the man was his friend,—and both of them were dear to him. But the woman had done what was right,—and that above all was a gladsome thought to Benny Brooke. For perhaps had she been a different woman she——

"I'm going, Ben," said Monteith, rising and reaching for his hat.

Brooke grasped him by the hand,—such a grasp that has in it the unspoken

words of affection that two men feel for each other at certain times in their lives. But Monteith's hand trembled like a woman's.

"And the violets, Monty?" said Brooke in a low voice; "what did you do with them?"

Monteith swallowed something that stuck in his throat. Then he drew a long breath and said, quietly, "They're home,—they're the first flowers a woman ever gave me, Ben, and I'm keeping them on that account."

And he jammed his hat quickly over his eyes and strode out of the room.

JOHN MARTIN'S WIFE

WHEN John Martin found out that his wife was in love with some other man and the man reciprocated, he sat down with a very white face to think just what he ought to do.

In the first place, he disliked scenes. During his five years of wedded life there had been the usual frictions consequent to connubial felicity, but there had been nothing tragic. He loved his wife thoroughly; he thought her affection was as his own, and if it wasn't, whose fault was it,—his or hers?

Candidly, he thought he wasn't to blame. He had sacrificed many a wish for her little whims. Maybe he'd been too complaisant. Jack Dennison was masterful, and perhaps that very masterfulness had captured Dora's heart. Well, it was too late now to try to remedy it all. No use to try and reason with Dora that he knew all. She'd go into hysterics, no doubt, but would that give him back the heart he'd won five

years ago? No, no, he couldn't live the lie out with her; yet his cheeks burned and his head swam at the thought of losing her.

Well, what was to be done? Kill the man and leave the woman? Kill the woman and leave the man? Kill both? Leave both? The last was a whimsicality only, yet the more he thought of it the less whimsical it became. Yes, that were best. Let them live and grow to hate each other,—only help them hate. But how? Better remove himself. He couldn't live without her, he loved her so,—and then when——

"John, dear," and Mrs. Martin came into the room. She was of medium height and dark; pretty and tragic looking.

"Yes?" he interrogated.

"The Dumphries are going up to the Glen day after to-morrow,—just for the day,—and they want us to go along. Only five in the party: Mr. and Mrs. D., you and I, and Jack. I asked that Jack could go with us, because, being your dearest friend, I thought it would be pleasanter. You'll go, won't you, dear? Mrs. Dumphries is down-stairs waiting

for an answer. We'll have such a good time."

"I'll go," he said, looking up at her with a queer little smile.

She caught the smile, and impulsively bent down and kissed him before she darted from the room. There was a world of pity in that kiss—and John Martin knew it.

The next day he arrived at his office early and wrote letter after letter. At three o'clock he had twenty-six of them written and stamped,—all addressed to the same place. Then he put them in a little grip and boarded a train for a place called Frenchtown, about twenty miles out. He was home to dinner at seven o'clock.

Mrs. Dumphries, who was nearest to John when his foot slipped and he fell over the bridge into the rocks and water that day at the Glen, was on the verge of nervous prostration for a full hour. "There was a piece of mud on his foot," she said, "and as we reached the bridge, he went over to one side and tried to scrape the mud off his shoe. Then his other foot slipped, and without a cry he toppled off the bridge, striking

the big rock all doubled up, and then slipped off into the water. I believe he was dead before the water touched him. But what a shock to poor Mrs. Martin to go off to a picnic at eight o'clock in the morning with her husband and to come back at eight o'clock at night with his coffin."

It was a shock, it is true. Of course it made her way with Jack Dennison easier now, but it was a shock, nevertheless, and she cried much that evening and slept badly. She was awakened by Mary, the maid, knocking at her door. Mary brought breakfast and a letter, and, after asking her mistress how she felt and putting the breakfast tray and letter on a chair by the bed, she discreetly withdrew and closed the door.

Mrs. Martin glanced languidly over to the tray and lazily looked at the letter. Then she started as if stung. The handwriting was John's. In a second she had picked up the letter and had torn it open. It was dated the day previous (June 1), and was as follows:

DEAR DORA,—I found out about Jack and yourself just three days ago. I didn't know what to do, but I did it. Trust I didn't scare

Mrs. Dumphries much, but I aimed for the rock, and hope I struck it. In the safe you'll find twenty thousand dollars insured in Travellers'—that's accident—and thirty thousand dollars regular. That'll keep you and Jack comfortable. I'm waiting down in the parlor in a rather cramped place, but I don't mind it, because I suppose I'll get accustomed to the coffin in time. Come down and see me when you can. Will write again to-morrow.

Your loving husband,

JOHN.

P.S.—Don't show Jack my letter; it might worry him.

And then Mrs. Martin swooned.

When she came to herself again she saw the letter in her hand. She could not have been long unconscious, for the steam was still rising from the coffee. She looked at the postmark on the envelope, and noted that it had been posted at six o'clock the evening previous and at Philadelphia.

She dressed hurriedly, sipped at her coffee, and, thrusting her husband's letter into the bureau drawer, she hastened down into the parlor. That long, narrow box—ugh! And how quiet was the house, and how dark! The sunlight that feebly sought to penetrate the parlor blinds had a sickly, a shamed look.

A few flies buzzed lazily against the window-pane. It was hot in the house, —hot and quiet. There was a waiting air, as if something were going to happen the very next second, but just waited and waited and waited.

She looked at the face in the coffin. It looked calm, but unfamiliar. A big gash had been cut across the mouth, and the nose was flattened somewhat. But the chestnut curly hair and the broad white brow! And then the woman prayed.

All day long people came and left their cards. Mrs. Martin saw no one— not even Dennison, who came in about supper-time. She went to her room early, but paced the floor until daybreak. Then she went on the porch to wait for the postman. She saw him turn the corner and then walked half-way down the block to meet him. He didn't think there was anything for her, he said. He must be mistaken, she told him, half hysterically. Yes, here it was, and with a glad cry she tore the letter from his hand and went swiftly up the porch, let herself into the house and up to her room. It was postmarked at

Philadelphia, but June 2 instead of June 1. "The dead keeps its word," she said, as she tore the envelope open:

DEAR DORA,—I haven't stirred since last I wrote. I suppose I'll be buried to-morrow, because in hot weather it doesn't do to keep corpses. They won't keep, when you come to think about it. Tell Jack not to be in a hurry about collecting the insurance. It's bad taste. Loan him some of your money, dear, if he needs it badly. Hope there'll be a crowd at the funeral,—you do so love excitement.

Your loving husband,
JOHN.

P. S.—Will write again to-morrow. Don't tell Jack.

The weary day had to be lived through, with all its glaring, unsympathetic sunlight, with all its heat, with all the comings and the goings, of door-bell ringings, of whispered orders, of subdued quiet. And her ears were humming and her heart was beating and her eyes were aching; but still the tears refused to come.

She ate but little breakfast, and then went into the garden, and gathering some flowers brought them in to the dead man. Then to her room again, where she

stayed the live-long day, denying herself to every one, and having her food brought to her.

On the third day came again the postman, but Mrs. Martin met him on the porch. The last two days had told on her, and she was very weak. Up in her room again she went and opened the letter feverishly:

DEAR DORA,—Well, in three or four hours and the deadly, sickly smell of flowers will be in the house. I suppose the coffin will be literally covered with them. I do hope Jack will send something. What are you going to send, dear? Two hearts of Bride roses intertwined and "At Rest" in purple immortelles over them? Either that, sweet, or just a little dagger of violets and a card saying, "He died to save his wife's fair name."

Your loving husband,
JOHN.

P.S.—Will write to-morrow.

With a great sob she threw herself on the bed, and the tears came in torrents. For over an hour she sobbed her heart away, and then the sound of the front door opening and closing frequently told her that the time for the funeral had come. Then she went down into the parlor.

The service was short, but Mrs. Martin neither saw nor heard. With her face in her handkerchief she sat there almost as immovable as the bit of clay for whom all present had come to pay their last respects. When she looked up, some one had tapped her on the shoulder. It was Dennison. All but he had left. She was on the sofa, and Dennison told her she had swooned.

"I didn't go to the grounds," he said, "because you looked so lonely. Well, I suppose you're glad it's over. I am."

She shuddered: "It seems so horrible, Jack. He was awfully good to me."

"Yes, he was—good to me, too, dying so opportunely. I'm glad of one thing in particular,—that John never found out. It would have killed him."

Again the woman shuddered. "Yes, it would have killed him," she said.

"Well, as his best friend, there can be no impropriety in me coming here often now, Dora. I'll be here to-night."

"No, no, not to-night, Jack!" she cried. "To-morrow night,—not to-night."

"Just as you say, Dora," and he bent down to kiss her.

She pushed him away tremulously. "Not here," she whispered. "He's just gone out from this room a few minutes ago."

"You're nervous, dear," he said, indulgently. "To-morrow night, then," and he waved her good-by.

For an hour or so she kept her eyes on a little strip of red, woven in the carpet. She noted two threads that were just a tiny shade lighter than the rest of the color. But her mind was on other topics, and all that day she wept and prayed.

Another day, another letter:

DEAR DORA,—I'm out of the house now for good. I'll never come back again, so don't worry. It were better had I gone long ago. It's rather dark and odorous, but under ground is sometimes better than being on earth. Not a worm or crawling thing has come to me all day. And here I am, dear, until God calls me forth. I'll wait for you here, because something tells me I won't have to wait long.

Your loving husband,
JOHN.

P.S.—Has Jack proposed yet?

That night Dennison called. He found Mrs. Martin in the sitting-room,

and he put his arm around her and kissed her. She submitted quietly, undemonstratively. "So good of you to allow yourself to be kissed," he said, lightly. "Are you growing reserved, Dora?"

She did not answer at first. Then, "Jack, I think I could hate you very easily. You either lack tact of late or else I'm growing supersensitive."

"The fault is yours, Dora. There's a change at work within you. Of course, I understand what you've gone through during the past few days. But the dead are dead. Let us live in the present and plan for the future. The dead set us a good example in the fact that once they're dead they never bother us again."

"Sometimes they do," she said in an awe-stricken whisper.

"Well, the dead in this particular instance can't. You never cared for him, and as he never knew it, why, you did your duty towards him. You have nothing with which to reproach yourself."

The next day was Sunday and no letter came from the dead. This fact rather than quieting Mrs. Martin made

her the more nervous. She came to look for the letters now, reproachful though they were in tone. The fact that it was his handwriting, the fact that he was in his grave, yet wrote her, combined to make the letters possess a horrible fascination.

And as the days passed and each morning the postman brought a letter from her husband, her mind began to waver. She was cool and ardent by turns to Dennison, she would start at the smallest sound, would pace the floor for hours talking to herself, or else go down into the parlor and study out that strip of red with the two faded threads in it.

On the 28th of June Mrs. Martin's letter was longer than usual:

DEAR DORA,—I expected that you would have come to me ere this, but as you have not I think I'd better come to you. The worms have made a horrid feast of me, but not one has penetrated my heart as yet. That is yours, dear, now as much as it was five years ago. Jack may have your heart now,—may have had it many years ago,—but you have always had mine. And it's still now, down in mouldy, darksome dirt, while things unseeable and unnamable are crawling near it.

And how does the house look now? Is the

little roof-garden that we planned three years ago in bloom now? You must answer all my questions when you come to me, and that's soon now. If you haven't any other engagement, dear, can't you meet me on our roof-garden at eleven o'clock to-night? It will be full moon, too, and do you remember—no, I'll tell you when I see you to-night. I'll call you at eleven.

Your loving husband,
JOHN.

P.S.—Don't tell Jack of your appointment.

Mrs. Martin only smiled when she read this letter. It was a patient smile, a smile of expectancy, a smile almost of love.

Dennison called as usual that night, and at Mrs. Martin's suggestion he took two chairs up on the roof, where on summer days an awning shielded the palms and plants from the sun. Dennison rolled back the awning, and the moon beamed down on the man and the woman and the things that grew.

The beauty and the quiet of the night made itself felt to both. They spoke little. Then Mrs. Martin moved her chair a little away from Dennison's and said,—

"It was on a night like this that John proposed."

"What did he say?"

"No woman tells that, Jack. A proposal is to her one of the sacred things of life—when she accepts the man. It is more sacred almost than the marriage ceremony. When she marries she has known her heart a long time. When a man proposes, however, he knocks at the door of her heart, and the words that he speaks fit the lock on her heart and the doors fly wide open for him. No woman who truly loved ever tells with what words the man unlocked that door."

And Dennison blew smoke in the air, but made no comment.

"I'm growing old, Jack; I'm almost twenty-five, but down in my heart of hearts I think I only loved one man in all my life. And that man was my husband."

Dennison sprang to his feet: "Are you going crazy?"

"I think I am," she answered, quietly. "I've felt so for the past three weeks. But to-night my brain seems cleared."

Dennison bent over and looked her straight in the eyes. They had a furtive look,—a shifting, unnatural gleam.

Then he said, gently, "You'd better come into the house, Dora."

"Not now, Jack; not until eleven o'clock."

"Why eleven?"

"Oh, nothing. What time is it now?"

He looked at his watch. "It wants a half-minute of ten. There goes the clock now."

From the church across the way the hour boomed out. Mrs. Martin counted the strokes, and then, with a little sigh, she settled herself back into her chair. Dennison sat down beside her.

"Do you know," she began, abruptly, "I don't think any one is altogether bad. I think we all, men and women, have more good than bad in us. Of course there are times when we think we will never have a good thought in us again, but it comes to the surface once in a while. The good must be harder to kill than the evil, for all that the evil is easier. Even the serpent must have had some good in him or God would not have allowed him in the garden of Eden."

"If God hadn't driven Eve out she'd have gone back to the tree for more fruit," said Dennison, sagely.

"No, she wouldn't," said Mrs. Martin with warmth. "Eve made it possible for the world to love. Ah, what do we women not owe Eve for that! For love is—what is love, Jack?"

"You," he answered, very quietly. He was growing afraid of her.

"Would you die for me?"

"I'd rather live for you."

"Die for me, then. Jump over that row of geraniums and fall into the garden."

"Dora!"

"Well, what is it? John did that much for me. He loved me. You're trifling." Her voice had a rising inflection in it. It was querulous and ugly.

Dennison was trying to gain time. He saw her condition of mind and meant to humor her. "So John would have done that, eh? It's a pity he isn't here now to prove it"

"He'll be here at eleven," she said, quietly.

Dennison started: "Did he tell you so?"

"He wrote me so. I received his letter this morning."

For one second Dennison's heart

seemed to stop. Up in the clouds here with this woman he loved, with air, earth, and sky calm and peaceful, with the moon shedding its soft light over all, there was a woman's brain all a-jangle, a woman's heart out of tune.

He sat watching her hands clinch and loosen and her lips move. He did not want to startle her, but just then the clock opposite began to strike. She was counting the strokes. At the eleventh she half rose from her chair.

"Dora!" shouted Dennison.

"His voice! his voice!" she cried. "John, John, I'm here!"

Dennison caught her around the waist.

"That was my voice, Dora," he said, quietly. "I called you."

"Liar!" she cried, striking him full in the face. "Liar and sneak! That was John's voice. He told me that he would call me at eleven. You have kept us apart too long as it is. There he is by the palm. John! John! I'm coming, dear! God bless your dear face, I'm coming!" And with a mighty wrench she tore herself from Dennison's arms and made straight for the palm on a dead run. Through the leaves like a

flash she tore, and went hurtling over and over and over in the air like a ball, landing in a little heap on the stone flagging.

When they picked her up she gave one tiny, little moan and moved her arms pitifully for a moment. Then she grew very still.

A letter came for her the next day when the undertaker was preparing her for the coffin. And the day after still another letter, but no more. And Mary, the maid, who knew what great store her mistress had placed on those letters, put one in each dead hand the day of the funeral, and then covered up the bruised hands with lilies of the valley.

And maybe, when we come to think it over, John Martin had done a grievous thing by writing those letters and when he was dead having some one post them. Or maybe he had been more at fault by living, for a good woman's name is far above rubies. And John Martin's wife died a good woman. So whether John did right or wrong only the good God knows.

APPLE BLOSSOMS

WHEN his conscience troubled him, which was often, he would reach up to his bookcase, take down a book and read. And then if his conscience still persisted, he'd begin to write. If neither reading nor writing would still that most uncomfortable of voices, he'd put on his hat and take a walk along a street that was instinct with life, and where he could see the thousands of lights and hear the jangle of a city's noises and speak to people he knew. And he'd usually lose his conscience somewhere or other before he got back to his rooms. Then, unless he was fagged out and fell asleep at once, his conscience would come sneaking into the room again when everything was quiet and try to keep him awake with its chatter.

His doctor told him he needed a rest. "You're full of nervous energy," said the learned man; "you think too much, smoke too much, read too much, do everything too much, in fact, but rest.

You'll go all to bits some day,—fall down in the street or be taken to an insane asylum." And twice a week regularly for the past three months he'd listened to the doctor tell him the precise thing—and smiled at it.

For the doctor didn't know. How could he know? The girl had been dead for a year and a half now,—almost a year and three-quarters, in fact. And his conscience—the worst ailment in the category of human ills—had broken out again.

He walked up and down the room, up and down like a caged animal, making quick, abrupt turns, clinching and unclinching his hands, his eyes blazing, his head buzzing and whirring and throbbing. And around the corners of his mouth played a smile,—a silly, unmeaning smile.

He thought he'd go out and get some air,—he needed it. Then, too, it was April, and he would walk all night until he got a whiff of the country and a sight of the apple-tree in blossom. So he put on his hat and walked down-stairs and into the night.

As he was closing the outer door a

boy handed him a note. It was in her handwriting—and she dead almost two years before. He never thought of that as he broke the seal. "Tell her," he said to the boy, "that I will come at once. I will meet her at the tree nearest the gate,—the one with the apple blossoms on it."

He was undecided whether to go up or down the street, so he stood on the steps a long time trying to think, and blinking at the electric light opposite. Then he straightened himself up suddenly and walked up the street with quick, nervous steps.

For an hour he walked, and the lights grew less frequent and the blatant noises of the city were softened, and the houses faded away behind him and a long, country road stretched before. And then he stopped and looked around expectant.

A bit of rag, a tattered muslin poster that had been tacked to a tree, fluttered in the night wind. The man saw it and took it as a signal. "Grace," he called in a whisper. Then he walked over to the bit of muslin and stood beneath the tree.

He tried to speak quietly to that tattered bit of rag, but his heart beat loudly against his ribs, and his words came tumbling out of his mouth like a man who had wanted to say something for a long time and never had the opportunity before. "Grace," he said, hurriedly, "I couldn't help it,—it wasn't my fault. I thought everything would be all right, you know. I never knew until after I came back home again, and I couldn't find you then. Ralph told me. Then I read of your death in a mad-house. I haven't slept since. That's why I came here to-night. I wanted to tell you how sorry I am, dear, and how my head hurts."

And then the April wind blew the rag toward him, fluttered it right in his face. And to him it took semblance and was a woman with wistful brown eyes from whose depths a love-light glowed. And as he looked into them they became insufferably sad. "Grace, don't look at me that way," he pleaded. "I am sorry—here, take this branch of apple blossoms and say you forgive me," and he reached up quickly and broke off a branch from a maple-

tree. "Smell them, dear; smell them," and he pressed the green leaves to his face. "Ah, how their odor brings back the old times! Do you remember you said you were going to wear them as a bride instead of wearing orange blossoms? And so you would have, dear, so you would have. But it's time yet if you'll go with me now. No one will know but that we've been married a long time,—no one knows anything except Ralph. He told me, dear, or even I wouldn't have known. Kiss me, Grace; smell these and say you've forgiven me, and—my God! Why do you look at me that way,—why are your eyes green? Why——" he stopped and brought his teeth close together and peered toward the ground six feet in front of him.

A pair of glittering eyes were gazing up at him. Slowly they crawled nearer and nearer, stealthily, noiselessly. Then with a snarl something hurled itself straight at his face and fastened its teeth in his cheek and tore big scratches in his face with its claws.

He caught the cat by its throat—a black, famished, crazy cat—and he stumbled backward. And then over and

over he threw himself, the cat snarling and spitting and biting and clawing while he was tearing at its throat with his hands and biting at its body with his teeth. For a full minute the man and the cat rolled around madly on the ground, and then with a mighty effort he caught it by one of its legs and swung it with all his force against the tree. He struggled to his feet, blood streaming into his eyes, his flesh hanging from his cheeks in ribbons. "Where's my branch of apple blossoms,—where is it?" he moaned, groping around for it.

The dead cat was on it and the maple leaves were dripping with blood. But he wiped the branch against his coat and then tiptoed over to the bit of rag.

"Come on, Grace," he whispered, "I won't forsake you again. Come on,—give me your hand. No, I'll carry you,—quick." He made a grab for the rag and tore from the tree a piece about the size of a handkerchief. "Hurry, dear," he gasped, "they're going to pursue us," and he made a dash for the road, in one hand the bit of rag, in the other the maple branch.

Down the road he flew with the speed

of the wind. Once he stumbled, for the blood got into his eyes and blinded him. But he was on his feet again in a second and tearing along straight into the city, hatless and bloody, the rag in one hand, the maple branch in the other.

He ran on and on until the breath was almost gone from his body. And then he sat down on a doorstep and began to cry.

In a little while a policeman came along. "What are you doing there?" he said, gruffly.

The man lifted his head and the policeman gasped with the horror of the sight.

"This," said the man very quietly, holding up the bit of rag, "is my wife Grace. We have just been married." For a moment there was silence, then, "This, my good sir," and he held up the maple branch,—"this is a branch of apple blossoms,—my wife's bridal bouquet."

The policeman bit his lip and looked intently at the figure on the doorstep. "Hadn't I better get a carriage for your wife and yourself?" he said, slowly.

"That would be very courteous in-

deed," answered the man. "We will wait for you here."

The policeman walked briskly to the corner, where a street telephone was located. In about five minutes the patrol drove up.

"Your carriage is here, sir," he called to the figure on the steps.

The man walked unsteadily to the curb. "Allow me, dear,—you first," and he held the bit of rag in front of him as he mounted the steps into the patrol.

"All right, Bill!" shouted the policeman.

And down the street clanged the patrol. On the bloody, scarified face of the man contentment was written. For his bride was on one side of him, on the other her wedding bouquet, and they had started on their honeymoon!

THE LAST CHAPTER

"IT seems like a page stolen from some romance," said the first man. "You and I and the moon, Ralph,—the drowsy humming of insects,—this quaint rose-covered porch,—the dew glistening there on the lawn,—the world fast, fast asleep on this midsummer night,—a night made, it seems, for dreamers and for those who love. And here we sit at two in the morning idly puffing cigars, unwilling to go to bed while Nature seems so wide awake."

"It's a pity, Frank, there's no sighing maiden to fit in the foreground. The picture would be complete then,—from the story-teller's point of view."

"That reminds me. How's the story coming on?"

"Famously,—I'm up to the last chapter. And for the life of me I can't finish it. I don't mean that exactly, either. I mean I can't finish it in a way outside of the general rut."

"Maybe I can help you," said Frank. "Give me a sketch of the tale."

"Oh, the plot's trite enough,—that's why I want to make the last chapter different." He looked over at his friend intently and smothered a sigh. "Two men and a woman,—that's the starter. The woman doesn't know which man she loves,—one day she thinks one way, the next day she thinks the opposite. She's positive she cares intensely for both, and she puts test after test to herself so as to solve the problem. She knows, woman-like, that both men care for her, and as the days go on, it dawns on her that both love her and that each is only waiting a favorable opportunity of proposing. Now comes her difficulty. The very second either one of them asks her to be his wife she must decide. She must either accept or reject,—and that's precisely what she doesn't want to do. She wants to wait,—to fence with fate. For not being sure of herself she thinks she might accept the wrong man. And so she contrives a little scheme,—she never allows herself to be alone with either of the men,—there's always the useful third party in their very imme-

diate vicinity. Of course, I've thrown in other people,—made a character study here and there,—but the three principals carry the tale. And I've brought them all up to the last chapter,—and there I am."

"I tell you a girl who could help you solve the puzzle," and Frank blew a puff of blue smoke in front of him, "Carrie Raines. She's a clever girl,—got a wonderful amount of intuition, too."

Again Ralph narrowly looked at his friend. Then he said, musingly, "I guess she could, old man. You love her, don't you?"

For the space of full half a minute no answer came. Then, "Yes, I do love her, Ralph. It came on me all on a sudden, a couple of weeks ago, this knowledge. And last week I made up my mind to speak. I went up to the house the evening I had made my resolve. She came out on the porch, and with her an aunt from Chicago,—a visitor. Aunty naturally stayed on the porch so late that I couldn't stay any longer without being positively rude. A couple of days later I called and asked her to go to the polo match. We went,

—and so did her brother Will. Yesterday she asked me over to play tennis and I thought my opportunity had come. But we played doubles, Dolly Farnsworth and I against Carrie and Dick Burn. To-morrow night I'm to take her biking, and I think I'll know by the time we return if I'm the happiest man in the world or the most miserable."

There was a tightening around the corners of Ralph's mouth as he asked, "So you think to-morrow night will tell the tale?"

"I hope so, Ralph. I love her so no human being can know the extent of my love,—only God and the angels can measure that. No man could love that woman as I love her," he added, softly.

The other man's face was pinched and white and drawn. Big, clammy beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead. His hands tightly clinched the sides of his chair, and he closed his eyes slowly, wearily.

A little breath of air came stealing up the lawn and brushed against the moonflowers and the roses that clambered up the porch; it shook the leaves of the

trees gently and woke a bird, who plaintively piped a sleepy note or two; and then all grew still again save for the deep, peaceful hum of the insects.

"I don't think there's another man in the case," went on Frank; "I hope not, at any rate. For one of us, God help him, must suffer. Oh, and what suffering it will be!"

The other man found his voice now. "But my story, Frank,—how about that last chapter?" His tone was petulant.

"Oh, hang your story, Ralph. Wait until to-morrow night, old man, and then I'll collaborate with you."

Ralph gave a little laugh, a very unnatural, hysterical little laugh. "Oh, no; not collaborate. The tale's not big enough for two men to work it out. You'll finish it for me to-morrow night, won't you?" he asked, coaxingly.

"To-morrow night I see her, Ralph."

"Yes, but after you come from there," said the other man, pleadingly. "You can stop here, you know, then. I'll be up and waiting for you, Frank. Will you?"

Frank got up and yawned: "Yes, I'll help you work out the last chapter

to-morrow night. I'm going home now. I don't think I'll sleep much, though, for thinking of her,—God bless her dear sweet self. Wish me luck, Ralph."

His friend grasped his hand nervously: "I wish you all the luck"—he was going to say "possible," but paused and added, "that I can wish you." Then he gently pushed his friend down the steps: "Good-night, Frank, and don't forget you're to drop in here afterwards."

"Good-night, Ralph," called back his friend; "but remember, old fellow, if the world goes wrong with me to-morrow night and I'm rejected, I fear I won't be much use to you in that last chapter."

A joyous, sudden exulting light sprang into Ralph's eyes. "If that does happen," he called after his friend in a hoarse, vibrating whisper, "don't come."

Frank waved his hand for reply, but did not turn his head.

And the man on the porch stood and watched the figure of his friend until a bend in the road hid him from view.

And then, in the fair fragrance of that perfect summer night, he dropped to his knees and burst into tears.

For in every man's life, be he ever so strong, there are times when he gropes blindly for sympathy. And tears are consolation, and they keep moist the heart that otherwise might shrivel.

A BUNCH OF VIOLETS

HE had two editions of Browning, —one a very beautiful copy on hand-made paper and copiously illustrated with steel engravings; the other a cheap little edition, printed on poor paper and with well-worn type. And he always used the poor edition, because he held that a book's fine binding, like a woman's fine clothes, never counted for much. The rich edition was a present,—a sister's gift.

And to-night, for no particular reason, he reached from the bookcase the ornate Browning and carried it over to his desk. And as he opened the book carelessly a bunch of violets dropped out.

He gazed at them blankly for a space, a puzzled look on his face. How did they happen in that book? Whose violets were they? When were they pressed together there between the leaves?

He pushed the book to one side and

looked attentively at the withered bunch of violets. They must have lain within the book for three years, he reasoned; he had the book for three years and a half, he figured, mentally, and had pored over it for a couple of months after he'd received it. And then, because it was bulky and fine and seemingly always on dress parade, he'd laid it by and had bought a cheap and homely edition,—one that seemed nearer and more friendly, by reason of its shabby comradeship. Yes, it must have been three years ago, he thought, since the violets went to sleep amid their beautiful surroundings.

But whose? Ah, yes, he recollected now. How stupid of him not to have thought of it sooner! Violets were Amy's flowers. And how she loved them, and would kiss them and press them to her heart and make a fuss over them, almost as if she thought they knew she loved them! He never knew another girl like her as regards flowers,—never knew so foolish a girl as to speak to flowers and hug them and kiss them and pet them, for all the world as one would to a human being. And he smiled a little to himself at the recol-

lection of it,—smiled a sad, wan, wistful smile.

She gave them to him at Asbury Park one summer day. No, it wasn't Asbury Park; it was Atlantic City, and they sat on the sand while he read his Browning to her. No, it wasn't Atlantic City, either; it was Fairmount Park, and it wasn't summer. It was mid-spring, and she had plucked the violets from their hiding-places and had bound them with a long blade of grass, he remembered. Yes, there was the grass!

It came back to him in a flash now. He saw it all as plainly as if the picture of it were thrown on a screen and he was looking on and drinking in every detail. There was the Schuylkill placidly flowing a quarter of a mile away; the drive almost at their feet; the young and tender green of the grass; the fresh, damp smell of the newly-born leaves; the hazy, trembling, sunlit air; and Amy, the light of the spring in her eyes!

And she had gathered those violets and had given them to him with a promise. She was to be his wife,—the violets were his guerdon, and he was to

use them as the knights of old did their lady's gloves or their kerchiefs or their bits of ribbon,—as things sacred and implying a trust, and not for the tiny insignificant things they really were.

And these were those self-same violets. How pitiful and shrivelled they were now! How ashamed they looked, too, as if the hurt of lying there in his full gaze had made them curl up and hide their little heads with the ignominy of it all! For knighthood had died in the centuries past, and he was only a man and was living in a practical age. And his face took on a weary look, and was white and drawn and pained as he lifted the violets to smell them. But all their sweetness and their fragrance were gone, just as the promises he had made and the vows he had sworn had gone. Just a little bit of withered memory he held in his hand and in his heart.

Only three years ago, he thought, and his eyes grew misty. But lives are lived in a day, in an hour,—hearts are killed in a second of time. And poor little Amy's heart had all the life crushed out of it three years ago. And where

she was now neither he nor his friends knew.

His friends! His lip curled with scorn of the thought. And yet they were not to blame. He had started down-hill of his own accord,—had kept on going,—was pretty near the bottom now. And even rats forsake a sinking ship.

What opportunities had been his! And how she—how every one—had believed in him, and had predicted great things of him, and had spurred him on! And now every tie, every memory that bound him to the past of only three years ago, was gone. Not a vestige of anything—except that withered, odorless, limp, dejected bunch of violets.

They lay in front of him in all the pathos of their utter loneliness. And he sat and looked at them a long, long time, as a man will look on things that are dear to him, and which tug at the heart-strings.

"My poor, dear, withered violets," he said to them, shaking his head sadly. "My poor, dear little Amy," he murmured in a choking voice,—and then his head sank on the desk and the tears

gushed forth. "My poor wasted life," he sobbed.

For it is a pitiful thing, indeed, when a man cries,—doubly, trebly pitiful, and more sorrowing when he cries over the years that have brought forth no good, and for the hearts that he has made heavy.

And maybe—who knows?—an angel or two in heaven is glad when those tears fall. For if pity is akin to love, so, too, sorrow at times is near to repentance.

For little things make turning-points in men's and women's lives.

And violets are little things!

BAGLEY'S BURGLAR

JOHN BAGLEY got his feet wet down-town, and it being the 20th of May, he recked little of colds. All day he trotted about his office, and when night came he went sniffling home to Mrs. Bagley. That solicitous dame made him change shoes and stockings, now thoroughly dry, and then told Bagley stories of how two of her friends, three years ago, and the young Roger boy last year had coughed their lives away from colds caught in the middle of May.

This only made Bagley nervous, so he took fourteen grains of quinine and six glasses of whiskey, and grew more nervous than ever. Then Mrs. Bagley told him, when they were in the dining-room, to put a few grains of chloral in a tumbler of ice-water and after he had drunk the contents of that tumbler he'd sleep like a top.

"My head's spinning like one now," he said, plaintively.

"For real babiness," snorted Mrs. Bagley, "recommend me to a man.

Here you've got a tiny little cold in your head and chest, and you imagine that you've got consumption. Why, man alive, even if you had consumption you couldn't die in less than six weeks. But galloping consumption's the easiest thing under the sun to die of,—just a quick fading away, like a moon-flower, you know, and no big aches or pains,—merely wasting. And there you sit making a fuss as if you were going to die by having wild horses pull you apart. Never in my life did I see such a baby."

"I suppose," said Bagley, meekly, as he carefully measured out the chloral into a tumbler,—"I suppose this chloral won't hurt me?"

"Who told you to take chloral?" demanded Mrs. Bagley, imperiously.

"Why you did."

"For heaven's sake, man, that whiskey has gone to your head. I never opened my mouth about chloral. Why, Jane Peterson—you remember the Petersons up in Holbroke, the family whose hired girl told all the neighbors about Mrs. Peterson's only giving her two dollars and forty cents because she went to a wake the night the baby had the croup,

though I never believed the story, because Mrs. Peterson's Bobby told our Harry last week that all the baby had for two weeks was measles, which wasn't to be wondered at considering the bad drainage they had in their house, and Jane just home from boarding-school."

Bagley's eyes were starting from his head. He was looking at Mrs. Bagley in sheer astonishment. He couldn't make head nor tail of the story she was telling, and he reasoned from that that he was drunk or dreaming, principally the former, and had unmistakably been mistaken when he thought she recommended chloral.

"Put that glass back in the closet," said Mrs. Bagley, "or you'll have the same experience that Jane Peterson had."

And still wondering in his befuddled brain what befell Jane Peterson (for he knew Mrs. Bagley had surely related the experience), he put the glass, spilling more chloral into it as he did so, back into the closet.

When they had reached the top of the stairs, Bagley bethought him of a mustard plaster.

"I think I'll get the two small mustard plasters in the bath-room," he said, "and put 'em on for a few minutes."

"They're good and strong," was Mrs. Bagley's sole comment, as her spouse carried the two tiny excitement-creators gingerly into the bedroom.

Bagley put the plasters on the bureau and got ready for bed. Then his courage oozed away. "I think whiskey and quinine much better than plasters," he said, thoughtfully. And he took two more pills and one more whiskey.

And then just as he was dozing off he was dimly conscious of his wife telling him of old man Johnson swallowing forty-one grains of quinine one night for a wager and how the doctor said that——

Then Bagley woke. He wouldn't have known he'd been asleep if he hadn't noted that his wife had ceased talking. He was in a profuse perspiration, and his chest hurt him.

He arose noiselessly from bed, and bathed in poetic moonlight he beheld the prosaic mustard plasters. He put one on either side of his chest and then—

"Gee whiz!" came involuntarily

from his lips. Those plasters took hold immediately. There was no timidity, no indecision, no lack of promptitude in their work. The very rapidity of their attack almost dazed him, and he looked out of the window with a set, silly look on his face.

Then he felt a great thirst come upon him. Seven whiskeys parch the throat, he thought, and how nice and cool, how deliciously comforting, how tremendously soothing would a pitcher of water taste, irrigating the dried-up desert of his throat! Then, too, water to quench the raging fire beneath those mustard plasters!

So he opened the bedroom door, and was groping his way along the hall, when a pair of muscular arms caught him round the waist, banged him to the floor and a burly form sat astride him.

"Burglars," he thought, and the perspiration began anew.

"John, is that you?" called a voice from the bedroom.

"Tell her," whispered the burglar, "that you were going for a drink of water and fell down."

"Why, that's just what I *was* going

for," whispered back Bagley in a surprised tone.

"Well, tell her the truth, you old fool," hissed the other. "What's the use of lying about it to your own wife?"

So Bagley called back to Mrs. Bagley as he was directed, and a petulantly muttered "Idiot" followed by a huge bouncing of the bed-springs told the unhappy Bagley that his wife had changed sides and was now off to Dreamland again.

"Where do you keep your money?" asked the burglar when Mrs. Bagley's snores were once more in evidence.

"Man, you're sitting plump down with all your might on two of the hottest mustard plasters that ever deviled a man," gasped Bagley.

"Wear mustard plasters, do you?" asked the Burly One, sympathetically. "I used to wear 'em once. Made 'em myself out of steel,—called 'em life-preservers. Once a fellow, pal of mine, took a knife to me and—well, I'll begin at the beginning, for it's very interesting and I know you'll enjoy it. This fellow——"

"For pity's sake," wailed Bagley,

"let me take these plasters off. They're burning my flesh; they're cooking my chest,—sizzling it,—broiling it. I'll open the safe for you, tie up the silverware, do anything, only let me take the mustard plasters off."

"Not so fast, my boy," muttered the burglar. "I'll get off your chest, turn my bull's-eye on you, and then you put your hands above your head and pilot me to the safe. I'll tell you what to do then."

The Burly One rose to his feet and poor Bagley followed suit. Then, writhing with pain, his hands straight up in the air, and the bull's-eye lantern throwing its powerful rays on his head (a fit halo for a tortured martyr), Bagley led the procession of two into the sitting-room, and stopped before the safe.

"Now, man, by all you hold dear in this world let me take the mustard plasters off," and Bagley dropped to his knees in front of the safe, the tears of agony rolling down his face.

"Open the safe," grinned his persecutor, "and you can take *one* plaster off."

The fires of an unquenchable Ætna,

of a river of boiling oil, of a never-ceasing Hades were glaring on Bagley's breast. Almost blinded by the tears that *would* come, whether he willed or not, he tried in frantic haste for the combination. Twice his haste reacted against him, and he was forced to begin anew. The third attempt, and the safe door opened.

With a glad cry Bagley's hands went to his chest, but a grip of strong fingers about his throat and the gleaming barrel of a pistol pointing within a wink of his eye caused the hands to drop nervously beside him.

"Keep cool," said his guest. "I'll remove the plasters meself," and suiting the action to the word, the Burly One pulled one of the plasters from Bagley's quivering chest. The chest was carnationed and puffy, horribly and atrociously swollen.

"Stand with your back to me and your hands above your head. A little to the left, please. There, that will do very nicely, thank you. Now, I'll see what you have of value."

"But the other plaster?" gasped Bagley.

"Damn the other plaster," said the burglar. "I'll put this one in my pocket, and in case you feel chilly in your night-gown I'll clap it on your back. You don't feel cold, do you?" he added, solicitously.

"I never felt warmer in my life," quickly responded Bagley. And he told the truth.

The burglar took his time, and nearly everything else worth taking.

"Now," he said, in a crisp business tone, "let's see what we have down-stairs."

"Anything I have in the world I'll give," said Bagley, hoarsely, "if you'll only take this other plaster off. I'm dying, man,—this is killing me. The tortures of hell are in my chest. I'm being burnt to a crisp before your very eyes. Come down-stairs quickly. Let me give you the cut glass and the bronzes,—anything, everything is yours if you'll only take this other plaster off."

"Shut up," rudely said the guest. "I don't want every one within a mile to hear you. Come down-stairs, tie up the silver, and I'll take the other blister-maker off of you."

Down-stairs they went. Bagley lit the gas, got the silver in shape, and with eyes red with weeping approached his tormentor. "Take it off! take it off!" he wailed.

The Burly One, very slowly, and as if enjoying hugely the torment of his victim, pulled off the remaining plaster. Then Bagley collapsed in a little heap on the floor.

Meanwhile the burglar was getting his plunder in shape. When he was ready to depart, he bent over the unconscious Bagley and held a mustard plaster to the sufferer's nose. The effect was magical. Bagley was on his feet in an instant, dazed, but thoroughly alive to the fact that his unwelcome guest was asking for something.

"What do you want now?" queried Bagley.

"Something to eat and something to drink," calmly responded the Burly One. "I'm hungry and thirsty. Hurry it up, too, or I'll clap these on you again," and he threw down the mustard plasters on the dining-table.

Bagley needed no second bidding. He was beginning to feel good. He

was quite sure his cold was cured, and as he and the burglar fished the cold meat from the refrigerator he recalled the conversation he had with his wife respecting galloping consumption. He almost laughed outright when he considered how truthful she was when she said galloping consumption was an easy death. Anything was an easy death when weighed in the balance against two mustard plasters.

They brought the cold meat into the dining-room, and the burglar showed himself a master at carving. "Used to be carver in a fifteen-cent restaurant," he said. "I carved the boss one day because he got impertinent."

And Bagley, instead of shuddering, laughed heartily.

"Let's have some beer, too," said Bagley, gleefully.

"Now you're talking," said the guest. "Get you're glasses and I'm with you."

The beer was in the refrigerator, but the glasses were in the china-closet, and to the china-closet Bagley went. He picked up the two glasses nearest him, and then—then he almost fell to the floor as a mighty thought went crashing and crunching and hurtling through his

brain. One of the glasses in his hand had chloral,—a big, big dose of chloral.

"I'll get the beer now," he said.

"All right," responded the Burly One; "but hurry it up, for I've got a ten-dollar thirst on."

It was the work of a minute for Bagley to pour a bottle of beer into the two glasses and to bring in two extra bottles besides. The chloral beer he handed to the burglar.

"Here's to the mustard plasters," said the burglar, lifting his glass and grinning.

"And here's to a good sleep to you after your night's work," said Bagley, also grinning.

And they both drank.

A scowl flashed across the Burly One's face. "Your beer's been kept too long. Tastes mouldy," he said.

"Yes," said Bagley, turning up his nose disdainfully; "tastes over-ripe. Better than nothing, though."

"A mighty sight better," assented his companion. "Have a slice of meat?"

"Don't care if I do," said Bagley; and the Burly One skimmed a shaver of cold meat skilfully across the table. Then he yawned.

Bagley's house-coat was hanging on the back of the Burly One's chair. "You'll find cigars in there if you care to smoke," he said.

The burglar fished in the coat in a sleepy sort of fashion and found a cigar. He took it out slowly and gazed on it in a solemn sort of way. Then he bit off the end and tapped the cigar on the table aimlessly, as if he didn't know exactly what to do with it. He rubbed his chin meditatively with his hand, then his hand fell listlessly to his side, and his feet slipped, and his body sunk lower into the chair. He opened his eyes heavily and gazed blankly at Bagley. Then he closed his eyes, and they stayed closed.

Bagley was on his feet in an instant and out into the kitchen. He found the clothes-line and with it hurried into the dining-room. He pulled back the chair on which the Burly One was sleeping, pulled it back very gently, and his guest slipped to the floor. Quickly Bagley tied those huge legs together, not once, or twice, but three times. He rolled the sleeper as one would a log. Then, the legs securely bound, Bagley took off

the burglar's coat, vest, shirt, and under vest. Moistening each of the mustard plasters he clapped them on the massive chest, and then, as the ancients swathed a mummy, so did Bagley swathe with clothes-line the inanimate form of that burglar. Perspiring, though happy, Bagley by way of celebrating lit every gas-jet in the room, put on his house-coat, lit a cigar, and watched with glistening eyes the unequal fight between chloral and mustard plasters.

It *was* an unequal fight. The Burly One gave a slight shudder, then a bigger one, then a bigger yet,—then opened his eyes.

"Those plasters are mighty powerful," ventured Bagley, sympathetically.

The burglar vouchsafed not a word. Once or twice he struggled, but soon saw that a thousand years of endeavor could not loosen one strand of the cord. Then the perspiration began to roll down his face.

"Wonderful, isn't it," said Bagley, "how those things do bring out the perspiration? I declare, man, you're beginning to color, too. Why, I thought it was interesting to watch the slow col-

oring of my meerschaum pipe, but here's something that's infinitely more diverting. If you don't mind, I'll have another glass of beer. Sorry you won't join me. Here's your health."

And Bagley tossed off a glass of beer with evident relish.

"Do you notice how the feeling of warmth spreads from the chest to the feet and from thence to the hips? They're wonderful things, those plasters, and they certainly do take hold quickly."

The Burly One was in agony, but he kept his peace. Bagley smoked and drank and talked. Three o'clock struck.

"Pardon me," said Bagley, "if I don't treat you with the courtesy due a guest from his host, but I must go up-stairs and get a wink of sleep. I'll be down about five o'clock, because I'm afraid the servant might be frightened if she saw you here in this undignified attitude on the floor. Allow me to gag you a bit; so; ah, not too tight,—I want you to breathe easily, but not call out. Now I'll leave the things you took from the safe and the silverware, besides the beer and meat. Help yourself and be perfectly comfortable. You'll find your

unsmoked cigar on the table here, and matches on the mantel. Be perfectly at home, and don't hesitate to ring for me if you want anything. Hope the mustard plasters are not chilling you. Good-night and pleasant dreams."

And Bagley turned out the gas, made a low bow in the dark in the direction of his guest, and went up-stairs to bed.

NUMBER FIVE

THE band in one of the gardens at Atlantic City was playing a lively air. A group of duck-trousered young fellows at one of the tables whistled in unison to the band's efforts and beat an accompaniment with their beer-glasses. Here and there immaculate-aproned waiters flitted like huge white-bellied moths beneath the hundreds of electric lights. The little tables were crowded; men and women came and went, exchanging a nod here, a word there. Little gusts of laughter floated round from one table to another; there was a rattle of moving chairs, of the clanging bells of the trolley-cars just outside, of the rumble of the busses. And above all was heard the band's insistence, drowning out with its brassy throat the clatter that surrounded it. And portly duennas in satins and silks, and with huge diamonds begemming them, sat in close proximity to tanned and sunburned girls in white lawn waists and crash skirts.

It was just the sort of crowd one al-

ways sees in such places. And all the women there were living in the vital present,—for nearly all had pasts and few had futures.

A girl at one of the tables nodded to nearly every man who came in or went out of the place. Some came over to talk to her, but did not linger long, as she evinced no especial interest in their society. Nor did she introduce to these casual chatters the man who sat beside her and who idly contemplated his well-kept finger-nails.

She was a pretty girl, demi-blonde, well fashioned and loudly gowned. She was sunburned sufficiently not to need rouge on her cheeks, but her lips were carmined and her eyelashes were pencilled. She yawned once or twice as though she was bored.

"Suppose we have a rickey," volunteered the man. "Hist!" and he snapped his fingers at a waiter who was passing.

"Please don't call that waiter," whispered the girl.

"Don't you want something to drink?"

"Yes,"—and the girl fidgeted in her chair,—"but call another waiter, not number five."

"Well, if you've got a special dislike to number five we won't call him," he answered, good-naturedly. And another waiter who was passing took the order.

"Here comes Jack Randolph," said the man; "he's looking sprucer this year than last."

"He came into a lot of money from an aunt out West," said the girl.

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, I know those things," smiled back the girl,—"have a way of finding them out. Say, Jack,"—this to Randolph, who approached the table,—"I'm awfully sorry I couldn't keep my appointment with you to-day, but I just didn't feel like bathing and had a beastly headache. You know Mr. Farnum, I suppose," and she gave a jerky little nod toward her companion.

"How do, Farnum? Why, yes, May, I was a bit disappointed,—waited for you half an hour. Anything on hand tomorrow morning?"

"Yes. I'm going driving with Tommy. Sorry. I can see you Saturday, though."

"Well, we'll have a drink to show there's no ill feeling," laughed Randolph.

"Hey, there, number five," he called to a waiter.

"Don't call him, please," said the girl, flushing through all her sunburn.

"Why not?" bluntly asked Randolph.

But the girl did not answer, and the waiter didn't turn his head.

"Here's a waiter," said the girl, quickly catching at Randolph's sleeve. "I'll take a rickey."

The band was bellowing a fragment from "Siegfried," and conversation was impossible. And after the drinks were bought, Randolph gulped his down and hurried away.

The girl looked over at the waiter that had a big five pinned on the lapel of his coat.

He was leaning against a table,—a tall, stalwart, good-looking fellow he was,—and looked at and through the girl who looked at him. And presently her eyes fell. "Let's get out of here," she said hurriedly to her companion.

They rose and started for the gate. Their path lay in the direction where number five was standing, and the girl stood directly in front of him, waiting

for him to move to one side or the other. But number five didn't budge,—stood there as if unconscious of her. And the girl pushed three chairs from her path and walked around the waiter.

Farnum was by her side in an instant. "If you'll let me," he said, "I'll go back and thrash that fellow."

"No, no," she answered affrightedly, laying her hand on his arm, "don't make a scene. Hurry out."

"What did you ever do to him that makes him so ugly to you? Ever hurt his feelings?"

They were clear of the crowd now and on the pavement. "Did you ever hurt his feelings?" repeated Farnum.

"Yes," answered the girl, and her voice shook,—"about three years ago when I left home. He's my brother."

She looked back at the garden where the hundreds of lights blinked. And her eyes blinked, too, and she swallowed something that was big and cumbersome in her throat, and that almost choked her.

"Let's go down to the Inlet," she said, wearily.

MOONSHINE

WHEN summer is merging into autumn, when a sunlit sea dances in gladness, when there's a shiftless, indolent breeze wooing, and time's to be killed and Mrs. Grundy is nodding, then there's a love tale afloat!

It began at Atlantic City in September. Clara Painter only knew him a week, but in that week Will Pearson fell in love. He bathed with Miss Painter in the morning, read Tennyson and Byron to her in the afternoon, and in the night they sat on the pier, neither speaking much, but content with the break of the waves and the trend of their thoughts. A bond of sympathy knit them, a subtle something that made its presence felt by the subjugating of both to a silence that was mutually satisfying. To talk at such times seemed almost sacrilege.

One night they talked of ideals. "My ideal," said he, "is a woman to whom my heart and soul would go out the instant my eyes had looked on her. A woman whose face would be the small-

est part of her beauty, whose nature would be as open as the day, whose heart would melt at suffering. A woman who could take to her heart another woman who had fallen, and who could help her without fear of what the world would say. A woman who could lead a man to do and not to dream. A woman of flesh and blood with passion's heat, yet conscience and a will to stay as steadfast and as true to him she loves as she would to her God."

"And my ideal," she said, "is strength. A man who battles with the world and throttles it, who battles with himself and is the victor, who battles for the woman whom he loves and wins her. A tender strength he must possess, and love of such deep magnitude no human thought could fathom it. He must be pure in heart, respect all women and love one, and to that one should cleave unto eternity. And one thing more," and here she lightly laughed; "he should have money, for I am such a terribly extravagant young woman."

Pearson's arms were ready to enfold her. The blood was surging to his temples, his heart seemed bursting. But

her last sentence was as a dash of cold water. He sat there, dazed. He heard the soft lap of the water at his feet, noted the lights on shore, saw the moon, molten and sullen, lift its huge bulk above the horizon.

He took her to her cottage and said good-night. Then he walked to the beach and sat down,—he wanted to think. Money and love went hand in hand, he thought. He was just in the humor for cynicism,—then, too, he was young, just the age for cynicism. Yet if money stood in the way of his happiness, the quickest way to gain happiness was to gain money. The story was not new, nor the situation. But it was new to him, and so he railed at women, at friendship, at love and virtue and honor and the world generally. Then he felt better and went home to bed.

The next day, without a word or a line to the woman he loved, he went back to the city. He would work for her, slave for her. And a few days later Clara Painter went to her home in Trenton. And in her heart she carried the image of the man whose ideal she fondly imagined herself.

Will Pearson tried to throttle the world, but the world was thousands of years old and Pearson only twenty-six. And so it came about that in a year's time what little he did have was swept from him. He invested for high stakes and lost. And the image of the woman he loved was always before him, comforting and helping him.

Clara Painter became engaged. Her father and mother died, and her father's business partner proposed to her. She asked for a day to consider, and reasoning that Pearson never cared for her, or he would have spoken or written,—that she was alone in the world and was poor, —that Mr. Darby was her father's nearest friend, she said "Yes," and was married.

Yardley, Pearson's matter-of-fact friend, was with him when the latter read an account of the Darby-Painter wedding. "It was my own fault, Fred," he said. "She never knew I cared,— then, too, she never cared for me. I love her now as much as ever,—more perhaps. Yet I'm poorer than ever. I'm not cut out for a villain. What shall I do?"

Yardley lit a pipe and pulled on it

reflectively for a time. Then, "Cultivate a girl, fall in love with her and propose. If she accepts you, tell her to wait for you two or three years. If she loves you, she'll do it; if she doesn't, she won't. Her love will keep you from being despondent; married to her you'll be safe from making either a fool or a villain of yourself over the other woman."

Pearson took his friend's advice. In three months he was engaged, in a year married, and the world smiled on him while Fortune patted his back.

Then, when old Time was cutting grass, the memory of one woman came to Pearson, came and refused to be put away. Came to him in the daytime and hovered near him, came to him in the silence of the night and stayed by him. And yielding to a strange, unreasoning power, he took the train one morning for Atlantic City. And on the boardwalk he met her. "Mrs. Darby, I believe?" he said.

"Yes, Will," she answered, "I've been expecting you."

"Why, I didn't know until a couple of hours ago that I was coming down to-day."

"I knew that, too," she said, quietly. "We met for the first time four years ago to-day."

He walked by her side, and they took chairs on the beach to watch the bathers. All that morning, all that afternoon, he was with her, and at night they sat upon the pier.

The old dread silence had come between them, the silence that was more dangerous than speech. For almost an hour they sat together without speaking, and then the moon came out of the ocean. Blood-red it was and big and cumbersome.

"I have often wondered," said Mrs. Darby, slowly, "if you recollected the night you told me of your ideal. The moon was red that night, too."

"Yes," he answered, "I remember. You told me your ideal also. I know you found it, or you wouldn't have married."

"I found my ideal, yes, but I married another man. And you?"

"I married also, but not my ideal."

"Did you ever meet her?"

"Four years ago," he answered, "but I was poor."

"If a woman loves a man," she said, slowly, "she would wait for him until eternity."

"The woman never said so," he said, bitterly.

"Did you ever ask her, Will?"

His face was white and drawn. He looked away from her as he said, "Never so long as my heart beats will it beat for any other woman. Night and day I have thought of her and worshipped her."

"And I have loved him," she said, passionately, "from the instant I saw him. I prayed to God that no harm might ever come to him, that he might some day come to me and claim me, for I was made for him. But the days passed and he came not, and I grew wretched. And then one day, more heart-sick, more despondent than ever, I gave my hand to another. My heart I could not give. It was given long ago. And since that day when I became a wife I have tried to banish him from my thoughts, but could not. And when the days seem long and the world stands still I go to my room and sit there and call him to me, and he comes. And

together in the twilight we sit and speak no word. And I am filled with a joy so deep that, though there is content in my heart, my eyes are wet with tears."

"And she comes to me, too," he said, "when I will it. There is a bond between us, and nothing on earth can destroy it. And in my senses she floats and my brain grows giddy and in my nostrils is the scent of a faint perfume. To-night I smell it and it almost maddens me."

She took her handkerchief and, tying a knot in it, tossed it over into the water.

"It is White Rose," she said, simply.

It was a long time before either spoke. Then Pearson, bending close to her, said, "If a man loves a woman and she loves him, why should anything separate them, Clara?"

And she said, sadly, "Were the woman free and the man free then nothing on earth, in heaven, or below could keep them apart. But they are not free, and she has her ideal and he his. No taint of passion has touched these two ideals. They stand apart

now as they did four years ago. She longs for him as he for her, but if either took a step too far, then forever and forever they would be apart. No longer in the times when each would need the other would they come and comfort by their presence. The laws of man stand up and warn them; the laws of God prohibit. Let the man be true to himself, the woman true to herself, and to each other, then they'll both be true. For love outlasts the world, Will,—and there's another life."

He listened to her, drinking in the music of her voice, with his eyes half closed. Then, when she had finished, he bent over, and taking her hand in his, raised it reverently to his lips and kissed it.

She took his arm and they walked to the hotel. At the foot of the porch steps he said good-night. The words were formal, but their eyes spoke the language of lovers. One long, searching, tender glance; a pressure of the hands and a sigh. So they parted.

The next morning he left Atlantic City, and the noon mail brought to Mrs. Darby the following letter:

CLARA,—All night I sat by the window, for my brain was afire. The soft, elusive presence of a woman filled the room, and, bathed in moonlight, drifted here and there about me. And when the moon paled and the sun came up, the breezes of morning brought with them hope. And I will live in that hope.

WILL.

Another two years passed, and the world jogged on, and men were born, men loved, and men died. Business took Pearson to Dover, and as he was walking one moonlight night down a side street toward the railroad station he noticed, standing in a garden, a woman. One bound took him to her. "Clara," he whispered.

She turned her face to him. "I expected you to-night," she said, softly. "You will never come to me in the flesh after this. But I knew you were coming to-night."

"But I thought you lived in Trenton," he said.

"No," she answered. "We left there over a year ago."

He touched her hand that rested on the fence, and she made no effort to release herself. "Clara," he said, "do you still remember?"

"I will never forget, Will," she said, tenderly, "nor will you. I am happier at this moment than ever I was in my life. For I know we will never meet again, and the joy of this moment must last for all time. The moon isn't red to-night, either. The rays are white and pure."

And then again there came over them that strange silence. And he felt the blood throbbing at her wrist, and knew that she was schooling herself and trying to subjugate her heart to her reason.

"Clara," he said, passionately, "is there no help?"

"No, no," she said, hurriedly, "no help, Will. Go away now, go away while I will let you. Do not——"

"Clara," called a voice from the house.

"It is my husband," she said, and with a last quick look at the man she loved she walked up the path and into the house.

"Who was that at the gate?" gruffly asked Mr. Darby.

"A man who wanted help," said the wife.

"Well, we don't want him around here," he snarled.

"That's just what I told him," she said, wearily.

And she went to the window and, pressing her face close to the pane, looked out at the fence where the Bride roses were lifting their hearts to the moon.

Thirty years passed and old Mr. Darby had long since been gathered to the soil. Mrs. Pearson had also taken leave of earth, and amid much pomp her mortal part had been heavily weighted down by a monster monument. The scene shifts to Atlantic City, and old Mr. Pearson is sitting in the parlor of one of the hotels when in bustles a stout old lady.

"Bless my heart, William, is that you?"

"Why, Clara, how are you?" said old Mr. Pearson. "I hear you're a widow."

"Yes, and you're a widower. Time flies, doesn't it?"

"It does indeed. Ah, here comes Dr. Truscott with the checker-board. You'll excuse me, won't you, Clara?"

"Certainly, William," she said as she moved off. "I suppose I'll see you again some time."

"Oh, I dare say," he said. Then to Dr. Truscott: "I used to know that woman when she was very much younger. But she's grown abominably stout."

"Oh, Mr. Pearson," shouted a young girl, bursting into the room, "come out and look at the blood-red moon coming up out of the ocean!"

"Blood-red moons be hanged," said old Mr. Pearson, testily. "Go on, doctor; it's your move."

THE BACHELOR SUPPER

THE Bagot-Austin wedding was to take place at high noon on the 10th of February. Everybody who was anybody was invited, for not only was Jack Bagot well connected, but Mary Austin had come from the Biddle stock.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of February 9th and Bagot had run up from his office for a call on his *fiancée.* She was bidding him good-by in the hall.

"Now remember, dear, not too much wine to-night. Enough to be jovial and witty and entertaining,—for the Bachelor Supper mustn't be a slow affair,—but not too much, Jack, dear. Promise."

He laughed. "I think I've been a very good boy the last year, Mary. Only once in a while,—for sociability's sake,—and precious little then. That's a big advance from the times when——" He stopped abruptly.

She leaned forward, and catching his face between her hands, drew him toward her and kissed him. "I know, dear,

what an awful drinker you were before you met me,—I know how you overcame yourself for my sake. But just be careful to-night. Tim Morton will be up to some freakishness,—why, look at him insisting that the ushers should give you the supper instead of you giving it to them. Of course, that's less expense for you,—we can get a beautiful brocaded chair, dear, with the money you save." And she smiled up at him at the happiness of that chair. For even a prosaic clothes-line is a joyous thing to a woman on the day before she marries.

"I'll be very, very careful, dear. It's going to be an informal affair,—the boys will just drift in. No full dress or frills, and I don't even know where they're going to take me. But—until to-morrow."

He held her until his arms ached with the strain of it. Then he kissed her again and again. For the sun would set and rise again until next he saw her, an eternity for lovers.

At five o'clock Tim Morton dropped in at Bagot's office. He waited until Jack had given some final directions

and then whisked him off in a cab. It was snowing slightly.

"Where's the spread going to be?" asked Jack.

"You'll see when you get there," answered Tim Morton. An odd man was Morton and he had an odd way of doing things.

The cab stopped at Clifton's, and the men went up-stairs to a private supper room on the second floor. Fales and Bancroft were waiting them. The table was set for eight.

"Where's the rest of the crowd?" asked Jack. "The best man is here, ditto two ushers; where are the other four?"

In a few minutes Brooke and Monteith came in. "Bates and Ashley will be here inside of six seconds," said Monteith. "We left them down the street, and Bates said to have the table set for five more people."

Jack's face expressed surprise. The rest of the crowd found the pictures interesting just then.

"Who in thunder is coming?" asked Jack. "I thought this was just going to be an informal spread for the ushers?"

"Look here, my boy," said Tim Morton, "you are only a little figure-head here to-night. You are our guest, but the supper's ours—and the invitations thereof. Now just smoke your little cigarette, and don't bother your——" and then there was a babel of voices, of tramping outside the door, and of woman's laughter. Jack started up as there burst into the room Bates and Ashley, having in tow Mabel Zane, little Maudie Faunce, Nell Foster, the statuesque Florrie Carter and her tom-boy sister, Ella. They made a bee-line for Jack Bagot, who tried to look pleased and succeeded fairly in the attempt.

"It's been an age since last we saw you"—"How well you're looking, Jack, old boy"—"Love agrees with you"—"So to-morrow you die"—such were the salutations that greeted him.

He shook hands with them cordially and said it was a most agreeable surprise. What else could he say?

They put Bagot at the head of the table and flanked him with Maudie Faunce, who had pink carnations in her hair, and the younger of the Carter girls. Then the other three girls judiciously distrib-

uted themselves among the seven remaining men.

"Tim Morton insisted that we come," whispered little Maudie Faunce. "Then, I wanted to see you again, Jack." She fingered the table-cloth and laughed nervously. "You didn't invite me tomorrow, you know."

Jack didn't answer. He couldn't exactly marshal his phrases. Then again he didn't know what to say. And so he kept his peace.

The supper was superbly served and the crowd of the jolliest. In less than an hour riot reigned. The lights, the tinkling glasses, the rippling laughter of the women, the scent of the wine, the chatter and the jest, the heat waves and the blur in the eyes,—while the snowflakes beat their tiny hands against the window panes in admonition of the madness of it all.

A white bit of lace and cambric, knotted into a ball, came flying up the table and hit Jack on the mouth. He picked up the handkerchief, and holding it to his nose, breathed in the odor. "That's Mabel Zane's!" he shouted, triumphantly. "I recognize the scent of ylang-ylang."

The crowd laughed, but Mabel only said,—and there was a touch of bitterness in the tone,—"What a splendid memory you have, Jack, to remember so long ago!"

The champagne was flowing freely. Twice Jack had attempted to stop drinking, for the face of Mary Austin had come to him, clear and distinct too, for all that the cigarette smoke was dense and heavy. There she was again,—or no, that was not her face either,—why, what in the world—yes, it was little Maudie Faunçe who was looking up to him, and the smoke was from her cigarette. What was she saying?—or was it Mary Austin speaking?—no, it was little Maudie Faunce,—but how soft her voice was:

"I wouldn't drink any more, Jack. Remember, you're not accustomed to it. Please stop, Jack, for my—for—for—pity's sake."

"Thirteen at the table and I never knew it," and up jumped the elder of the Carter girls. "That's Tim Morton's stupidity," and in a jiffy Florrie Carter had one of her slippers off, and was belaboring Morton's luckless head with it.

Morton caught the slipper and threw it to Monteith, who in turn tossed it to Brooke. Then Nell Foster got it and threw it at Bates. It missed him and hit the wall opposite.

There was a general scramble for the slipper, and the crowd fell over the chair on which Jack Bagot's hat reposed, Then Montieth held the hat on high, and the girls commenced to kick. Maudie Faunce was the only girl left at the table. She was quieter than was her wont. So was Jack,—but then he was sleepy.

"My hat, Maudie," and he waved toward the kickers. "My hat—only one got to go way wish to-morrow."

"It's to-morrow already," said little Maudie Faunce, and as Jack lifted the champagne glass to his lips, she gently caught his arm, and drew the glass down to the table again. "No more, Jack," she said, quietly.

Then Montieth caught two champagne glasses and clinked them together as accompaniment while Tim Morton whistled "The Blue Danube." Nell Foster was waltzing with Brooke. They always waltzed well together

when Morton whistled and Monteith played the champagne-glass accompaniment.

Morton remembered that no toasts had been drunk, so he rang for more champagne. The elder Carter girl held her glass on high: "Here's to you, Jack. May your married life be as free from care as your bachelor days with the crowd."

Jack didn't want to drink any more, but then it was a toast, and to him. "Don't take more than one sip," whispered little Maudie Faunce. And he did as she told him.

Then Mabel Zane drank his health, and so did Ella Carter and Nell Foster.

"Aren't you going to give him a toast, Maudie?" shouted Tim Morton. "If you go back on Jack, then he'll never have a friend in the world." At which the crowd laughed. Yet there was little humor in the remark.

And so Maudie Faunce rose to her feet. Her voice was unsteady, but it was not from drink. "Here's to the luckiest woman in the world," she said.

"Well done, Maudie," shouted Brooke. "The cleverest speech of the

night, girlie." And the crowd applauded.

But little Maudie Faunce, her face as white as the cloth in front of her, sat down and did not even smile.

"Now the whole crowd must drink Jack's health,—and in goblets." The suggestion came from Monteith.

And so more champagne was brought, and this time Jack Bagot drained his glass. And then nothing would do but that he must drink to the crowd since the crowd had drunk to him. He tried to fight off the issue,—but he was their guest. Then, too, this was the last time.

Was that Nell Foster turning somersaults on the floor? Surely not. Yet it looked like her. Did he see it, or only think he saw it? Some one was helping him on with his overcoat. He felt very sleepy.

Then the crowd began filing out, making a great racket, and laughing and jostling, and calling names and imitating animals. And as Bagot, who was last to go, turned toward the stairs, he felt something moist and warm touch his hand. Sleepily and lazily he looked down. Little Maudie Faunce was on

her knees beside him. She was kissing his hand. He almost stumbled in his effort to raise her.

She looked up into his face and he noted in his dumb, impotent way that she was crying. "Once upon a time, Jack," she said, "and I thought you were going to——" she stopped. The laughter from the crowd in the street came mockingly up the stairs. She shivered and drew closer to him. "Would *she* care if you kissed me good-by,—the last kiss? Oh, the kisses that we have wasted in one little hour, and now this last kiss must do for all the many, many years to come." She threw her arms around him wildly, and kissed him with all her might and heart and soul and passion. Then she tore a pink from her hair and put it in his hand. "Oh, God," she sobbed, and caught at her throat. Down the stairs like a wild creature she flew.

Jack Bagot looked at the pink in his hand, looked at the empty room and blinked. He put the flower in his overcoat pocket and walked slowly down the stairs.

He was greeted with a fusilade of

snow-balls. Then he saw the crowd pushing its way into two cabs,—six people to a cab.

"Come on in, Jack!" shouted Tim Morton. "There's room on Ella's lap. We're going to run the girls home, and then we'll drop you at your lodgings."

"Rather walk," said Jack, thickly.

"Walk, and be damned then!" cheerily shouted Tim Morton.

The drivers chirped to their horses.

"Where's little Maudie Faunce?" shouted Jack.

"I'm in here, Jack," came her voice from Morton's cab.

"Good-night, Maudie."

"Good-by, Jack."

Then there was a great shouting of adieux, and of admonitions, of taunts, and of drunken raillery. Then the cabs drove off.

Jack started straight ahead. His feet were unsteady, and the falling snow blurred things; but the crunch under foot was soft, and just to his liking. He felt very contented. A clock from a neighboring steeple tolled three.

When he reached the first crossing he wasn't quite sure which way to go.

He came to the conclusion that it didn't matter much.

After he had walked fifteen minutes he felt very sleepy indeed. His storm-coat was good and thick,—what mattered it which way the streets cared to run? Then, again, the air was not cold, and the snow was soft. And so he sank sleepily down.

Somebody was shaking him,—shaking him roughly, too. "Get out of that, you drunken sot," said the voice.

Jack Bagot looked around him. It was daylight, and a policeman stood over him. Slowly he got to his feet. Merciful God,—that house opposite! It was the house *she* lived in! And he had slept in the gutter opposite her house! He was sobered in a second.

"I haven't been accustomed to drinking," he said, apologetically.

"They all say that," answered the policeman.

"I'll never drink another drop."

"They all say that, too," said the policeman, yawning.

Jack stood irresolute for a second. The policeman started to walk away.

"What time is it?"

"Just struck seven."

"Well, at noon to-day I'm to be married."

The policeman looked at the man contemptuously from head to foot. "God help the woman," was all he said.

Jack Bagot turned and walked slowly up the street. Mechanically he put his hands in his overcoat pockets. His right hand touched something soft and he drew out the pink that little Maudie Faunce had given him. He stopped to think where he got it. Then he threw it into the street and it sunk swiftly out of sight in the white, soft snow. "God help the woman," he said, solemnly, looking at the stem sticking up from the place where the flower had sunk. "God help the woman," he repeated.

THE CLASS DINNER OF '87

THE ninth annual dinner of the Class of '87, University of Pennsylvania, was very nearly a matter of history. It had reached the cheese and cracker, coffee and cigar stage, and the time was close on to one o'clock in the morning. There had been many clever speeches, a fair amount of wine drunk and some robust singing of college songs.

Seventy-three men were present,—the biggest crowd since the Freshman supper, eight years ago,—and the conversation, which had been largely shouted from one end of the table to the other, had now dribbled down into private chats between a man and his *vis-à-vis* or his next-door neighbor.

Anderson, the president, a big, broad-shouldered, coarse, florid-faced fellow,—one of the college team in '86,—rapped on the table. "Gentlemen, our Alma Mater," and each man sprang to his feet and drained his glass.

"Here's to good old Penn" started

Zeigler in a rich baritone, and the grand old song floated and rose and sank as each man's voice repeated the words, and as each man's heart beat a bit faster and each man's brain was busy with the thoughts of other years.

Densmore, who was on the New York *Sun*, and had come over for the dinner, was sitting next to Fielding, a Philadelphia physician with a large and fashionable practice. On his left was Martin, minister of the Union Congregational Church at Weymouth, Massachusetts.

"Saving many souls, Martin?" queried Densmore.

"A few," said Martin. Then he smiled. "You kill souls, Densmore, old man, with your pessimistic short stories, and Fielding here kills bodies with his nostrums. You sap the moral life, Fielding the physical, and then I come in and try to save the spiritual."

Fielding laughed: "Well, I make more by my killing than you by your curing."

"Brute force only," chimed in Densmore.

There was silence for a second. Then Fielding's face grew grave. "Talking

of brute force," he said, "there's Anderson, our president. I'm his physician,—just came from his house to the dinner. Well, here's Anderson laughing and joking and having a royal time and his wife sick unto death at home and—what's the matter, Densmore?"

Densmore had given a little gurgle, and his face was ghost-like and pinched. "I—I swallowed some smoke,—that's all. My lungs are not very strong," he added, apologetically.

"Go to Colorado for three months and quit smoking," said Fielding with professional briefness.

"I never cared for Anderson at college," said Martin. "He was too physical,—too much beef and too little brain. I could never imagine a woman wanting to marry him."

"The woman didn't want to," said Fielding. "Have you heard the story, Densmore?"

"I think I have," he answered, slowly, looking at the table-cloth. "Maybe Martin hasn't."

"I'd like to hear it," said Martin.

Fielding cleared his throat: "It's short. Anderson's father was of big financial

assistance to Miss Grandin's father,—gave him ten thousand dollars once and kept him from going to the wall. Old man Grandin died about six months after, and knowing that Jack Anderson's son liked his daughter, he made her promise, just before he died, that she'd take Frank Anderson if he asked her. Seems like a plot out of a novel, doesn't it? Well, now for the tragedy. She married him three years ago. He's all brute, she's all delicacy. She began to pine, and little by little she's going to bits. She's not physically ill,—only mentally. But I've diagnosed her case and I know what's the matter with her."

"What?" asked Densmore, quickly.

"One of two things. Either her nature demands love—just as a flower must live and thrive in sunlight, and die if sunlight is denied it—or else——"

"Or else what?" demanded Densmore, his voice unsteady.

"Or else she loves some other man, and the strain of the deception, the hopelessness of her position, is too much for her."

Densmore took a big gulp of wine. "I should think," said he, looking

straight ahead of him into space,—"I should think that being in love with another man would be good for her,—would give her something to look forward to. Anderson can't live forever."

"But it's not morally right," interposed Martin. "The marriage ceremony is explicit. 'And *forsaking* all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live,' it says."

"But," pleaded Densmore, "Fielding says it will kill her not to have love."

"Let her die, then," said Martin, decidedly. "Better for her, for her husband, for her lover. Do you know her, Densmore?"

He felt his face crimsoning, but answered steadily enough: "Yes, slightly. She's a lady, Martin, and would never do what she shouldn't. And I thought—if Fielding's diagnosis is correct, and she loves another man—why, I thought there was no moral wrong in it. In fact, old man," he went on, earnestly, "there's nothing in the world like love. To a woman it is the Alpha and Omega of life. She must love something,—a dog, a cat, a bird—a man. Here this wom—this lady that Fielding is telling

us of, was forced into marrying a man who is a brute. She doesn't care for him,—detests him. Then another man comes and she loves him—and he loves her. For the first time in her life she gives her whole heart. The man is a gentleman. There is no wrong morally now, is there, Martin? Mind you, she's a lady and he's a gentleman."

Fielding wheeled around like a flash. "Do you know him, Densmore?"

Densmore immediately started to carve out squares on the table-cloth with the back of his knife. He finished the design carefully, and then looked up into Fielding's eyes defiantly. "Yes, I know him," he said, quietly.

"Gentlemen," came the voice of Anderson from the head of the table, "let us drink to the absent."

The three men sat down again with a sigh. Not one of them was thinking of the same absent one. Yet they all sighed.

Martin was the first to break the silence. "You ask me, Densmore, whether I thought her conduct was morally wrong. Now I'm a minister, but I'm as broad and as tolerant as any of you laymen,—her conduct is morally wrong.

The husband is a brute—yes. But the wife? Does it make her way the easier because he is a brute? Does it give her license to do what she should not? She promised, you know, before God and man—'*forsaking* all other.' I'm not preaching, Densmore, but Fielding will bear me out in what I say."

Fielding blew a long path of smoke straight before him. "Yes, you're right, Martin," he said, slowly. Then after a pause, "The man is killing her,—not her husband, but the other man. I told her a year ago that she needed some change. 'No, no,' she said, in a frightened sort of manner, 'I don't want to go away.' 'But,' I said, 'you don't have to go any distance. Take a little trip over to New York once a week and do some shopping. It will be a change; you'll see new things, new faces.' Well, she acquiesced immediately. Now, the day before she goes to New York she's all sunshine and gladness. The day after she gets back she is downcast and melancholy. It's the reaction. Say, Densmore,"—he broke off abruptly and wheeled again towards the newspaper-man,—"does the man live in New York?"

Slowly two red spots showed themselves in Densmore's cheeks. Then they spread over neck and forehead. In a moment they were gone and the man's face was ashy white. He said no word, but nodded his head in the affirmative.

Fielding looked at him attentively for a second and opened his mouth as if to say something. Then he gave a long, low whistle. Martin was rolling a bread ball around his fingers reflectively and knitting his brows; Densmore was gazing into his glass and biting his lips.

Then came a rapping from the head of the table. "Gentlemen," began Anderson, "it's five minutes of two, and time we were dispersing. I propose one more toast, drunk standing." Every man rose, glass in hand. "Gentlemen, I propose drinking to our Sweethearts and Wives."

Densmore raised the glass to his lips. "Sweetheart" ran through his brain. "Wife"—and the lights danced.

Then he put down his glass untasted.

THE END.